

**Coren on Christmas****PAGE 4****Gift ideas****PAGE 9****Christ at the centre...****PAGE 10****REDEEMER UNIVERSITY COLLEGE****CHRISTIAN COURIER
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CHRISTIAN COURIER

Christmas Issue

Tell me the old, old story

Walter Wangerin, Jr.

Once upon a time the world was dark, and the land where the people lived was in deep darkness. It was as dark as the night in the daytime. It had been dark for so long that the people had forgotten what the light was like.

This is what they did; they lit small candles for themselves and pretended it was day. But the world was a gloomy place, and the people who walked in darkness were lonelier than they knew, and the lonely people were sadder than they could say.

But God was in love with the world.

God looked down from heaven and saw that the earth was stuck, like a clock, at midnight. "No," he said. "This isn't good. It's time to make time tick again. Time, time," said the mighty God, "to turn the earth from night to morning."

And God was in love with the people especially.

He saw their little candlelight, and he pitied their pretending. "They think they see," he said, "but all they see is shadow, and people are frightened by shadows. Poor people!" he said. "They wonder why they are afraid." God watched the people move about like fireflies in the night, and he shook his head. "People, pretending to be happy," he said. "Well, I want them to be happy. It's time," declared the Lord our God. "It's time to do a new thing! I'll shatter their darkness. I will send the sunlight down so they can see and know that they are seeing!"

God so loved the world that he sent his only son into the world itself. And this is how he did it:

Once upon a time, when the whole earth was cloaked in a cloud of darkness, God in heaven turned to his angel and said, "Gabriel."

And the angel said, "What, Lord?"

And God said, "Go. Go down. Go tell my people remarkable news —"

So there was an angel flying through the night. So swiftly he flew that nobody noticed. Across the continents the angel went, to a particular province named Galilee, to a city named Nazareth, and then in that city to one particular house, to one particular woman sleeping in that house. Her name was Mary. She was smiling in her sleep.

The angel Gabriel appeared at Mary's bedside and began to grow bright.

The angel opened his mouth and spoke to the woman. "Hail," he said.

But the angel's voice was like thunder.

Poor Mary awoke with a terrible start. Her eyes flew open, and she saw the brilliant light beside her, and she heard the glorious greeting in her ears, and she caught her breath, did Mary, because she was afraid —

When the angel said, "Hail" in the middle of the night, like bright explosions in her bedroom, poor Mary jumped and covered her mouth and could not talk, because she was afraid.

God in heaven whispered, "Hurry, Gabriel. Comfort the woman."

So the angel said, "Hush, Mary." The angel softened his glorious voice and murmured like rain in the night, "Mary, hush. The dear God loves you, don't you know? God favours you, and the Lord is with you."

God favours me? Mary was trembling. Her mind was racing in the unnatural light. This greeting of the angel troubled her. What does it mean? What is he saying? she thought. Why would an angel come to me?

"Mary, do not be afraid," said the angel, still more gently — and the light grew warmer than bright, and it touched her, just on the forehead, with a single beam of kindness. So Mary grew calmer; her mind grew quiet; and she began to listen.

"Behold," said the angel, "you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a son, and you shall call his name Jesus."

A baby? thought Mary. *A baby?*

*The Annunciation by Henry Ossawa Tanner (1898, oil on canvas).*

"Quickly, Gabriel," said God in heaven. "Tell her quickly what this means."

And the angel did a comely thing: he stopped speaking, and he started to sing. So marvelous was the meaning of this baby, that it wanted a song for the telling.

"Mary," sang the angel:

*Mary, the child of thy labour shall be great;
The Son of the Most High shall he be called;
And God shall give him the throne of his
father David;*
*Over the house of Jacob shall he reign
Forever and ever: his kingdom shall have
no end.*

A baby? thought Mary in spite of the music. How dear was the promise. How deeply she longed for it. But there was a problem she couldn't ignore. Desire was troubled by that problem, and Mary astonished herself.

She actually spoke to the angel.

"How can this be?" she blurted — and the angel stopped singing, and God in heaven began to smile.

Well, maybe the angel didn't understand the nature of human bodies. Some things had to happen first for other things to happen second. "How can this be?" said Mary meekly on her bed. "I'm not married, you see. I don't have a husband yet."

That was the problem. Not the greatness of the baby, not his kingship, nor that the kingdom would last forever — but that the baby needed, first, a father.

There came a strange sound in Mary's bedroom then, like the creaking of the walls, or the cracking of the universe. It was an angel chuckling. For the thing that he was telling Mary was a miracle, after

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News

Old, old story *continued*

all. The new thing God was doing didn't depend on nature. First things didn't need to come first anymore, and the baby would have a father, but not the kind that Mary imagined.

So the angel continued, in a happy melody, to sing:

*Mary, the Holy Spirit shall come upon thee;
The power of God shall overshadow thee.
And what shall they call the child that is born of
thee?
Why, they shall call him holy! The Son of God!*

Mary said nothing for a moment. She was grinning and gazing at an angel, and her eyes were bright with the light. A baby, and more than a baby, oh! The Son of God. Then God would father this baby. Oh!

The angel stopped singing and murmured, "Mary?"

Mary raised her eyebrows and stretched her grin from ear to ear. "Mmm?"

"With God," the angel assured her, "nothing will be impossible."

So Mary, kneeling on her bed; Mary, bowing as lovely as the lily, whispered, "Behold"—"Behold!" she said, "I am the handmaid of the Lord. Be it unto me according to your word—"

Which word was: Mary is going to have a baby! Yes!

So the angel was done, and he dimmed. The bright light faded from her bedroom. Gabriel vanished altogether. But Mary didn't mind the darkness now.

A baby!

Oh, she jumped from her bed, and the giggles tickled her throat. Oh, she clapped her hands and twirled about, and her dark hair flew like a glory around her head. Oh, the virgin was laughing now, for the virgin was going to have a baby!

So who had news for the telling now? And who would burst if she couldn't tell it? Mary!

So now there was a blameless, beautiful woman running through the world, the dark world, as fast as she could go. None of the people noticed her go. She didn't mind. She was grinning and full of good news. South she ran, to a particular province named Judea, to a particular hill, and on that hill to one particular house and one particular woman in that house, her friend, her cousin Elizabeth.

"Elizabeth, hello!"

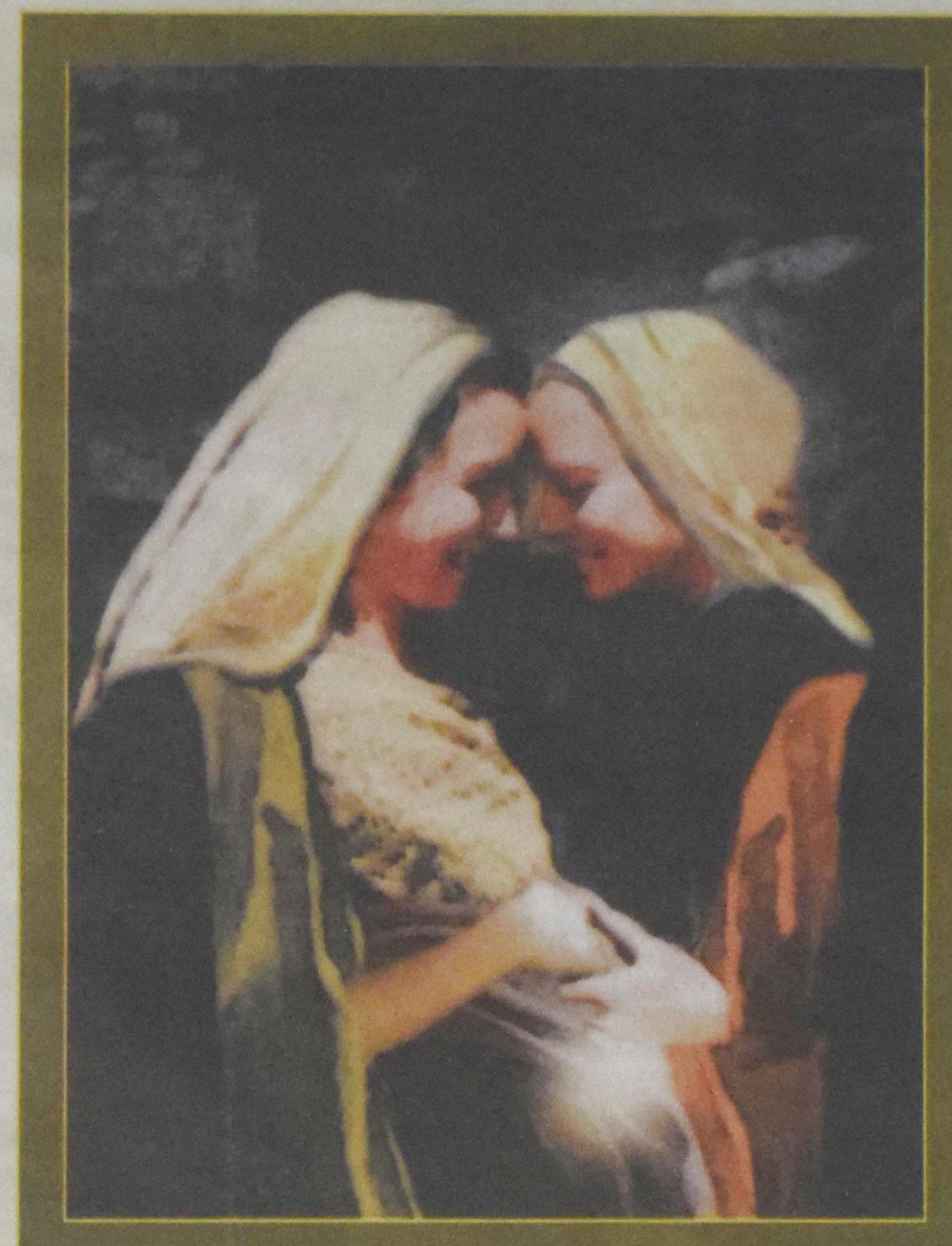
Just as the angel had greeted Mary, Mary greeted Elizabeth, and Elizabeth began immediately to laugh.

And just as the angel had sung his celestial song for her, she sang a song for Elizabeth.

"My soul," sang Mary, "O cousin, my soul doth magnify the Lord. My spirit rejoiceth in God my Saviour. He is keeping his promises to us. Elizabeth! I'm going to have a baby!"

So then – in the middle of the gloomy world there were two women laughing. They laughed until they couldn't laugh any more, and then they began to weep for gladness. And God looked down from heaven and saw them. And the Lord God smiled. ▶

This excerpt represents the first part of a Readers Theatre service as presented in Reformed Worship Issue 41 (reformedworship.org), a division of Faith Alive Resources. It originally comes from "The Manger is Empty" by Walter Wangerin, Jr., published by HarperCollins. Used with permission.



Claire Joy, a contemporary painter, is a sister at Community of the Holy Spirit in New York, NY. This piece is called Advent.

members will tell them about their losses. The big house had to be sold. The lifelong career is over. Society's values have changed too quickly. Now young people seem to be running everything that these older folks worked so hard to build – the company, the country, even the church. Their kids live far away. Visits to the doctor have become very frightening.

So we gather at church, young and old alike. Some of us Mary. Some of us Elizabeth. But our common terrifying realization, that life is not what we had thought, binds us together in a unified confession that God is mysteriously at work. And in that confession, hope is conceived (*When God Interrupts*, p.42-3). ▶

Rev. M. Craig Barnes is pastor at Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, Pa. and author of seven books, most recently The Pastor as Minor Poet.



CBC polices new Police Chief

Peter Schuurman

"No one chose him to be police of our souls," says professor Arthur Schafer under the CBC's web headline "Winnipeg Police Chief Touts Prayer to Help Combat Crime." He concludes: "It's inappropriate."

Winnipeg's new Police Chief Devon Clunis, 48, had no clue that his recommendation to "pray for the peace of the city" and "put some action behind that" would be a bone for which CBC journalists would lunge. It didn't seem to matter that the intended audience for his recommendations was the rather modest Winnipeg-based *Christian Week*. Interviewers construed him as suggesting crime would be solved by everyone simply praying. Then the debate exploded.

One of the media's roles is to report on what public officials are saying and translate that to citizens. When they sniff a scandal, they might play watchdog to draw extra scrutiny to a severe situation. For some at CBC, a public official suggesting prayer merits intense inquiry.

Chief Clunis, a former police chaplain, unwarily wore his heart too visibly on his sleeve and was taught a secular lesson. Two different CBC radio reporters went after him on Oct. 22 and 24 to corral him towards something more politically correct. With CBC Manitoba's Katie Nicholson he was too trusting; consequently, when Piya Chattopadhyay followed up on *The Current* and started to jab at him for his prayer-talk, he became much more guarded.

She played a pre-recorded message for him from Dr. Schafer from the University of Manitoba Centre for Professional and



Winnipeg Chief of Police criticized for recommending prayer to public. Applied Ethics, who concluded that the chief needed to learn to separate his "deeply held private religious convictions" from his public office. Chief Clunis, he added, shouldn't use his position as a "bully pulpit from which to proselytize." Chattopadhyay pressed the point, asking: "Do you [now] plan to keep your religious beliefs in your more private realm of your life?"

He basically repeated what he said in the first interview: prayer, followed by action, makes a difference. "I would be abandoning everything that is the core of me if I stood before you and told you something otherwise."

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News/Column

Police Chief *continued*

Winnipeg is the murder capital of Canada. The interview included quotes from city folk who said they felt unsafe, scared to venture out at night. The police chief said that lining the streets with more officers was just dealing with the symptoms: the root cause was the breakdown of the social fabric, and that requires addressing the forces of good and evil in our society – with prayer and action.

Secular is not neutral

The gist of CBC's beef with the Chief seemed to be that "this is not the way we do things here in Canada" – a misnomer on a number of fronts. Stephen Harper, just after his victory speech during the last election, quoted from the national anthem: "God bless all of you; God keep our land glorious and free."

Additionally, it was only a short few decades ago when CBC itself used to have clergy and prayers regularly feature on the radio. Up until the early 1960s there was a morning devotion offered by a minister for ten minutes before the 8 a.m. news.

What is especially ironic about this incident is that Devon Clunis is a black Christian immigrant from Jamaica. Historically speaking, we might say that the Europeans passed the Christian faith to African slaves in Jamaica and now we have a descendant of those slaves passing it back. If the gospel is good news for the oppressed, there are people in Winnipeg who might hear, hope and help.

What CBC is experiencing is similar to what secular elites in Europe are encountering with recent immigrant populations from the global south. Many of these migrant workers are devout in their faith, and secular elites fear their religious expression can only foster conflict, not compassion. So faith-conscious folk are ghettoized.

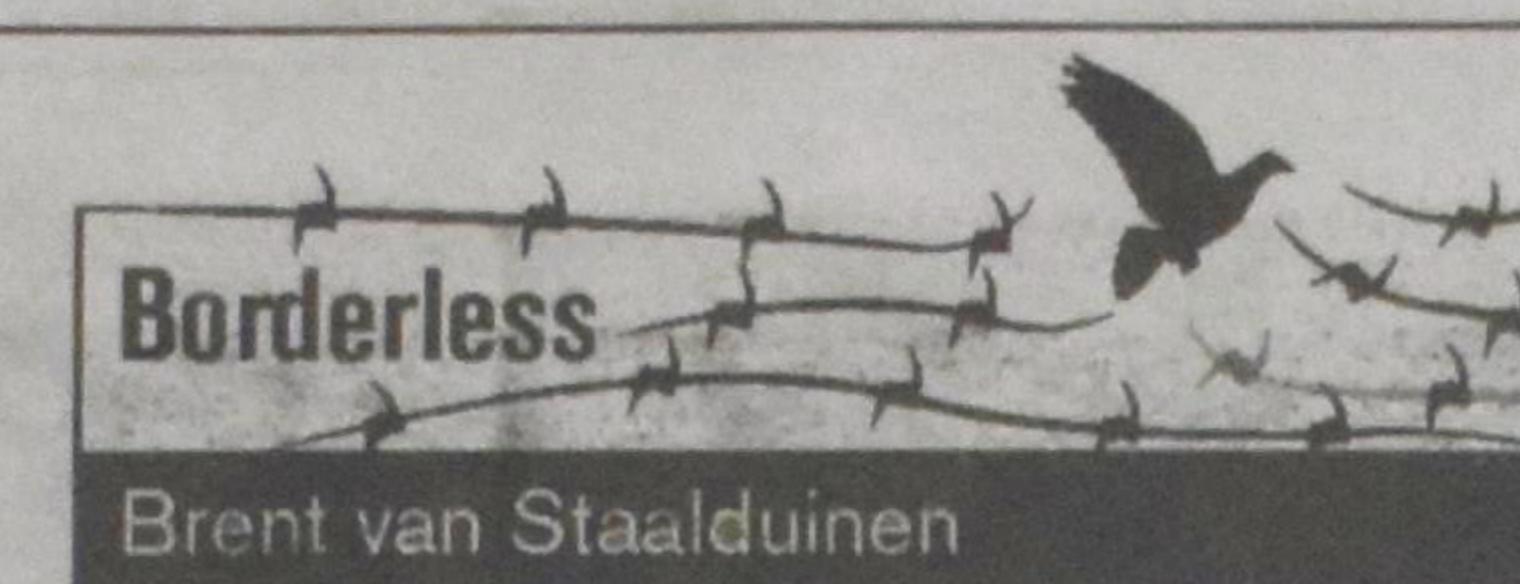
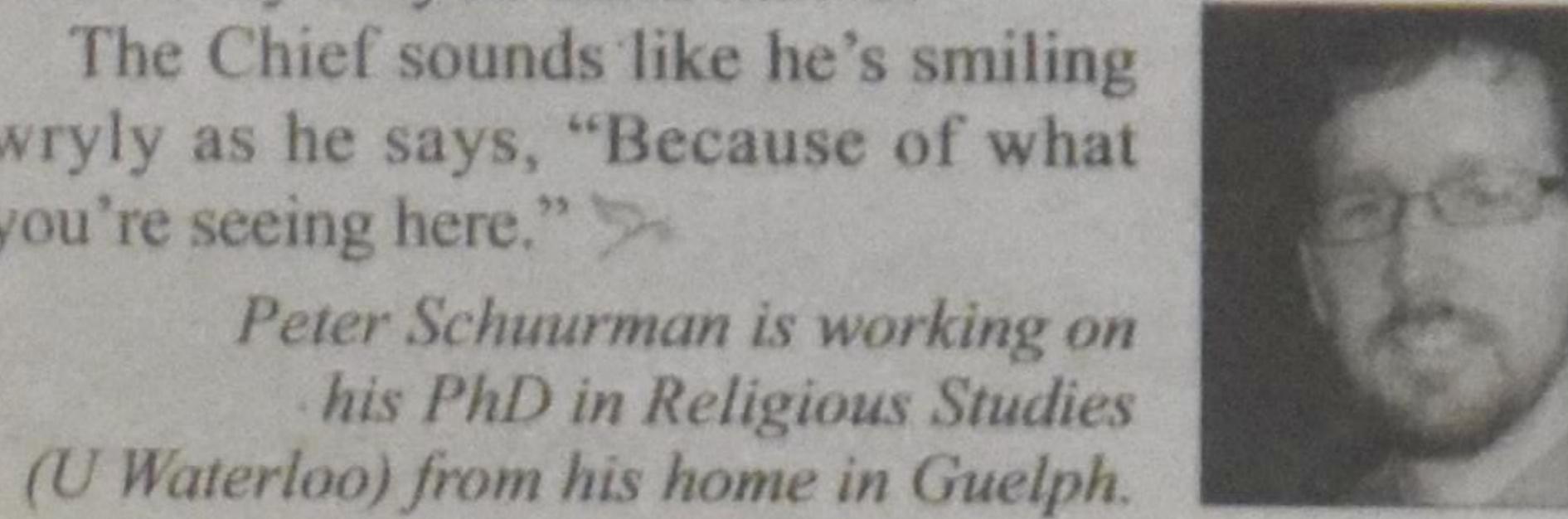
Jürgen Habermas, one of the more prominent intellectuals in Europe, has called for a shift to a "post-secular" society. This does not mean a return to Christendom but rather the end of a secular monopoly on public life. If Muslims, for example, are to participate in public life, they have to be allowed to participate as Muslims. They can't be required to talk like atheists. Chief Clunis was very open about his faith and emphasized how that generates a profound sensitivity to people of all faiths and non-faiths. Responding honestly to their persistent questions about his Christian beliefs, he did not bang a "bully pulpit" or "proselyte." What Chief Clunis has done is challenge the assumption that modernization requires secularization, an old thesis crashing on the global wave of desecularizing movements. "Canada is a secular society," declared Chattopadhyay, not recognizing that "secular" is not religiously neutral and it really has no basis in any national policy in Canada.

There is, however, a national policy directly applicable to this case: the Multiculturalism Act of 1971, which has echoes in the CBC's own broadcasting mandate. There is no multiculturalism, however, without multi-faith, and multi-faith requires listening, learning, respecting each other in our public institutions. The "lesson" from CBC was quite to the contrary, generating a chilling effect: if you aspire to public office, pretend to religious indifference and keep your faith hidden in the closet. Leave public service to those who can play the secular compartmentalization game.

Chattopadhyay asked Chief Clunis rather condescendingly at one point in the interview, "We don't hear many people in public life talk this openly about their faith. Why do you think that is?"

The Chief sounds like he's smiling wryly as he says, "Because of what you're seeing here." ▶

Peter Schuurman is working on his PhD in Religious Studies (U Waterloo) from his home in Guelph.



Brent van Staalduin



There is no greater challenge faced by Christianity in the 21st century than the misguided, ignorant religion of Islam. Take a moment and survey your reaction to that statement, one that cuts between the obvious criticism of Islam and the absolute challenge to Christians. Where did your instinct steer you? The side of Christianity? Islam? Somewhere in the middle? Was it difficult for you to read and assess?

I hope so, because it wasn't meant to be easy. Lately, especially as the peace and love and shiny-happy messages of Christmas ramp up, I've been thinking a lot about the honesty of what we say to each other and to others. We don't often say difficult things any more, do we, preferring watered-down words so we don't offend. People don't hear criticism well even when the truth is at risk.

We have developed entire systems to accomplish this. Our young people are expert linguists in political correctness. Politicians, rather than a simple yes or no, deflect and sashay around difficult questions. Pastors ignore Hellfire and Brimstone in favour of Peace and Love. We Christians become so scared of our own shadows that we won't call them shadows any more.

Enter Islam. As we negotiate in places like Iraq and Afghanistan with gunfire and steel, at home we moderate our words for the Muslims who fill immigration quotas and settle in our neighbourhoods. However, they bring beliefs that are antithetical to harmony that we should speak against. Yet we don't, afraid in the knowledge that it isn't about taking criticism well but rather an inability to take criticism at all.

Crosses to bear

We do have our own crosses to bear, of course. How do we respond, for example, when someone says that the Bible advocates the oppression of minorities? That the creation story is purely grand metaphor? That Christianity is intolerant of other religions? That our church councils propagate misogyny by closing halls of worship to women ministers? We focus inwards, distracting ourselves rather than discerning ways to deal with the planks in our eyes so we can continue to bear witness. We forget that things still need to be said.

I think Muslims need to hear, for example, that blind adherence to the teachings of Mohammed is idolatry. And that Islam cannot be defended as a religion of peace. That Sharia law is barbaric. That Islam's treatment of women is abhorrent. That Islam's systematic destruction of knowledge and culture is a crime against humanity.

But Muslims can't hear those things. Not yet, anyhow. Aside from a few feeble dissenting voices, the majority, largely ignorant to Islamic history, cannot assess the injustices and inaccuracies in their religion's teachings. When things are said, there is no discussion, only blind rage. There are abundant examples, such as the uproars caused by the laughable film *The Innocence of Muslims*, Terry Jones' burning of the Koran, Mohammed the Bear, satirical Danish cartoons of the prophet Mohammed or the Iranian fatwa against *The Satanic Verses*.

Listening to ourselves

Christians certainly aren't perfect, yet we do have some extra history on our side when it comes to developing a response to the criticism of our faith.

Things said, things unsaid

Our instinct might be to react against the most common and seemingly harsh criticisms, but time often reveals truth in them. We do have the blood of innocents on our hands. We have much to answer for when it comes to gender equality. We too often cling doggedly to long-loved biblical precepts despite evidence that challenges their authenticity. We leave our minority and LGBT neighbours to confront harassment alone. We dishonour our children when we ignore stories of domestic abuse. Uncomfortable truths, all, yet ones we must acknowledge.



Discussion, not blind rage, needs to follow criticism of any religion.

But we need more refining, too. We need the world to keep hurling truth, stones, epithets and criticism so we can continue to endure them in the name of Christ, transforming ourselves in his name. We also need to know how to receive messages from each other, keeping ourselves sharp by not running away from criticism and controversy. Acknowledging untruths. Laughing at ourselves, if need be. Changing when required. There are no words that can diminish God or his perfect narrative for us.

In this, we can lead by grace so that Muslims, who don't have the certainty in their beliefs to see them through the mere words and actions of others, will question and refine themselves. So they will look to God, whose image we bear, and will seek salvation in Christ, who speaks through us. ▶

Brent and his wife Rosalee live in the Westdale area of Hamilton. Visit brentvans.com to find more of his writings.

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Editorials

The battle against Christians

Michael Coren

The Christmas season, and that means two things: the celebration of the birth of the Messiah, and the opportunity for the secular world to make fun of those

who believe in that birth, and indeed of Jesus himself. The battle against Christmas is a reality. And it is part of the greater war against Christianity. *The Da Vinci Code*, television documentaries claiming to debunk Christ, best-selling books labeling the faith and a concerted attempt to marginalize Christianity and abuse its followers.

In response we should establish a few basic facts about the Christian faith, because it really is too late to sit back and do nothing. Scripture itself requires us to always have a ready defense of the truth. One of the most significant points to make is that almost every discovery in Biblical archaeology in recent years appears to prove the Bible right, even to the point of surprising Christian and Jewish scholars.

As for Jesus himself, Jewish records refer to Jesus of Nazareth and did so even before Christians had written about him. One of the most important is Josephus, a Jewish general who abandoned his people and became a friend of the Romans.

Josephus mentions Jesus in his writings several times. It is almost certain that later writers revised his words to make them seem more pro-Christian, but it is the revisions and the not the original statements that should be removed from the debate. Josephus knew of Jesus because no commentator of the time could not know of him.

The Roman biographer Seutonius also refers to Jesus and a riot across the Tiber by supporters and foes of Christianity. Pliny the younger, Governor of Asia Minor, speaks of Christ and Christians. Next comes the ancient historian Tacitus. He discusses the great fire in Rome, how Nero was probably

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responsible and how the emperor placed blame on the Christians, named after Christus, who was crucified by "one of our governors, Pontius Pilate."

Conquered even death

Then there is the Gospel evidence for Jesus. For years we have been told that it is unreliable, written long after the events occurred and even by people other than Mark, Luke, John and Matthew. Not so. Serious scholars now agree that the Gospels were completed well before 100 AD, obviously by men who were present during Christ's life.

In fact no reliable Biblical expert or scholar of ancient history doubts that Jesus lived, that he claimed to be the Messiah and that many who knew him believed that claim. The idea that he was just a great moral teacher is ridiculous. He claimed to be the Son of God. If he wasn't, he was telling the most vile of lies or he was mad. Liars are not trusted and the insane are not followed.

We are not, of course, obliged to believe. But the first generation of martyrs certainly did. People die for the wrong reasons, but they assume them to be the right reasons. If their faith in any idea or any person can be broken, they are no longer willing to make the ultimate sacrifice. Yet men and women who knew Jesus lived with him, saw him die and saw him rise again. They then went to their deaths with a smile.

This is extraordinarily important because the followers of Christ were in chaos when they saw their leader crucified. It was the resurrection, an event he had promised, which caused them to believe once again. It was the resurrection which led so many of them to die a martyr's death. There is no logical explanation for the martyrdom of those who followed Jesus other than that they knew, without doubt, that he was the Messiah and that he had been raised from the dead.

There were many martyrs and they came from every section of society. The most learned and the least educated, the wealthiest and the poorest, young and old. And Christian martyrs are still dying. In the Middle East, Asia and Africa they are persecuted and slaughtered. In Canada they are mocked, silenced, shouted at and, in some cases, prosecuted for their political and social views.

But truth is still truth, Jesus is still Jesus and Christmas is still Christmas. Snow, December, carols, trees? All quite lovely but none essential. What is essential is the man himself, who came to us a baby. Have a wonderful and blessed Christmas. Amen.

Michael Coren is host of The Arena on Sun TV and writes a weekly column in more than a dozen newspapers across Canada. His latest book, Heresy (2012), debunks 10 great myths about Christianity. See michaelcoren.com for more.

Come O come Emmanuel

Angela Reitsma Bick

"Once upon a time the world was dark, and the land where the people lived was in deep darkness. It was as dark as the night in the daytime"

(Wangerin, p.1). Mid-November, this felt like an apt description of life in the land of Jesus' birth. I was working on the Christmas issue of *CC* and listening to news updates from Gaza like a parent sifting through a torrent of *he-hit-me/she-hit-me-first* excuses. The entangled actions have roots as old, some say, as the antagonism between Sarah and Hagar.

On the radio, Minister of Foreign Affairs John Baird says, "It's not that complicated. We have terrorist groups shooting rockets into a neighbouring country." I don't agree. It is complicated. The truth is bigger than sound bites and national headlines. It feels like a small thing, but I want to pay attention. I want to fight the local darkness of indifference.

This year alone, Hamas militants have fired over 750 rockets into Israel; Operation Pillar of Defense is Israel's response. When Israel retaliates, I am reading *Son of Hamas* – the true story of Mosab Hassan Yousef, a Palestinian Muslim whose father helped start the radical Islamic movement known as Hamas in 1986. I'm living vicariously through the first two intifadas and having nightmares of missile-targeted cars and shrapnel coat-bombs. Nothing seems to have changed since then, except perhaps the weapons. In 2012, Hamas is better armed, but Israel's defenses have improved too. And not just shields – the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) has its own Flickr account with infographics of how many Israelis are under fire. It has a Tumblr account, a Pinterest board of top soldiers and a Facebook page that posts how many rockets have been launched each day. Is it tanks against rock-throwing kids all over again – with the Internet as Israel's newest weapon? The IDF even declares war on Twitter.

Oranges that explode

But both sides can use technology to make sure their voices are heard. I get two emails in one day that convey the desperation of many Palestinian people as the death toll mounts. The first quotes Mahmoud Darwish, a Palestinian poet: "Gaza is not the most beautiful of cities. And Gaza is not the most polished of cities, or the largest. But she is equivalent to the history of a nation, because she is the most repulsive among us in the eyes of the enemy – the poorest, the most desperate and the most ferocious. Because she is a nightmare. Because she is oranges that explode, children without a childhood, aged men without an old age."

The second comes from a coalition of Palestinian Christians, who make up roughly two percent of the population.

"Help stop this madness that is further and further dimming all hope for peace, justice and eventual reconciliation," they cry.

There are attempts to help. Several outside parties tackle another round of peace talks. Now I'm mid-way through *Son of Hamas*, just at the part where Hassan Yousef explains that "Israel's very existence, not its policies, are the ultimate problem" for Hamas (58). Many militant Muslims believe the land belongs to Allah, period. And some of them feel it's their job to eradicate the Jews – nothing personal. What does compromise look like under those circumstances?

Darkness will flee

Finally, after a week, an uneasy ceasefire is negotiated. Both sides withdraw to mourn their dead: at least 140 Palestinians 5 Israelis. Both sides worry that the violence will erupt again, as if it were a force of nature beyond their control or understanding. Many of the Gazans who died are being praised as martyrs by Hamas; the Israelis remember their dead as heroes. It seems like senseless death followed by senseless celebration. Half a world away, what can we take away from this conflict? How can we avoid getting depressed by the on-going fighting?



By remembering that God's love for his children is bigger than our capacity to hate each other. Each Christmas we celebrate that God's love came down in the shape of Jesus right where these wars are happening; then and now, our God is in control. The Peacemaker of the world was born right in Bethlehem – right where he's needed – and with his arrival all darkness will be overcome.

Light can penetrate even hardened Hamas hearts. An encounter with God's word eventually brings Hassan Yousef to Christ: "The message of Jesus – love your enemies – is what finally set me free" (249). Since being baptized in 2005, Yousef has spoken out on behalf of Israel and against the hypocrisy and violence of radical Islam. The dramatic turns of his life show that "truth and forgiveness are the only solution for the Middle East" (251). No one except Christ can bring lasting peace to his old neighbourhood.

*O come, O come Emmanuel
 Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
 And death's dark shadows put to flight.
 Rejoice! Rejoice!
 Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel.*

Angela Reitsma Bick is Editor of *Christian Courier*. She lives in Barrie, On.

Letters

Moderate Muslims need to speak up

The article "Mosque moves into former Christian school" (Nov. 12, CC) quoted Mr. Kooy, member of the First CRC, stating that "no one is really uptight about it. We're living in peace, which is a beautiful thing."

Of course, living in peace with people of different races and beliefs is a good thing. But this event in Guelph is not one in isolation. It's good to get along, but we should spare a thought for the millions of fellow Christians and other non-Muslims who do not live in peace. [We should not forget that] radical Islam has declared war on non-Muslims and the entire West, through violence (jihad), and by gradual infiltration of the major institutions of the non-Muslim world. As the Turkish Prime Minister has pointed out, mosques play a key role in the latter process. Even in Canada, mosques have served as places of indoctrination in jihad. (See the excellent investigative reporting by Stewart Bell.) Islamic schools in Canada have

also been found to teach hatred of the West, and especially Jew-hatred.

I do not write this to rain on the parade of the Guelph people. My reason for writing is two-fold. One, while we have the benefit of living in a peaceful, tolerant country, we should give a thought (and a prayer) to fellow Christians and other non-Muslims, especially young girls and women, who are suffering unspeakable hardship in some 56 Muslim countries. Here, Christians are persecuted, imprisoned, killed and driven from their churches and villages in Islamic-ruled countries where they have lived for generations.

Two, peaceful Muslims must be troubled by their extremist co-religionists who have declared war on all "infidels." We non-Muslims cannot do much to persuade them otherwise. But peaceful and tolerant Muslims in the free West are in the best position to change Islam from within. Some, including the Canadian

authors Tarek Fatah and Salim Mansur, are trying to do just that.

The Muslim Society of Guelph should be challenged to stand with these two authors, because also in Canada militant Muslims are threatening "infidels," and even fellow Muslims, with the death sentence. This is currently happening to the Canadian Coptic Christian Nader Fawzy, who has been forced into hiding. I hope that the new owners of the former Christian school building in Guelph will speak up in defence of freedom of religion, and use whatever influence they have in the Muslim world to end the horrible crime of persecuting innocent people.

Harry Antonides
Toronto, Ont.

Christianity in Russia older than we think

According to the article "Why Russia persecutes non-Orthodox Christians" (Oct. 22, CC), "the Russian Orthodox Church was born in A.D. 988 when Prince Vladimir was baptized in the River Dnieper along with all the inhabitants of Kiev." The Russian Orthodox Church may have been born that year, but there is something problematic in that statement. Two decades earlier a Byzantine "diocese" seems to have been established, although its location is not certain. Already in the sixth century Byzantine missionaries had converted Lazes as well as Abasgians and Zichians. And Germanic Ostrogoths, who had moved from the Baltic region to the Crimea around AD 200, were Christians in the fourth century. Armenia and Georgia, at the southern border of Russia, were converted in the third and fourth century. Legend has it that the apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew converted Armenia in 34, the year after Pentecost.

While there is no evidence to substan-

tiate this legend, there were Christians in Armenia at the time of Emperor Decius' persecution in 250. Great Armenia became the second state, after Edessa, in which Christianity became the official religion. Earlier in the ninth century the Slav brothers Constantine, also called Cyril, and Methodius were missionaries in Russia. These scholarly brothers devised, according to tradition, an alphabet for writing in Slavonic, perhaps the Cyrillic or Glagolitic script.

In other words, Christianity had been in Russia for quite some time before the Kievan state accepted it. From a neo-Kuyperian perspective, such an alliance between church and state confuses the sovereignty of spheres. Throughout history such alliances have led to frequent persecutions and the present situation in Russia stands in that tradition. The alliance is as problematic – and I would also say, as unholy – as that espoused by Islamists.

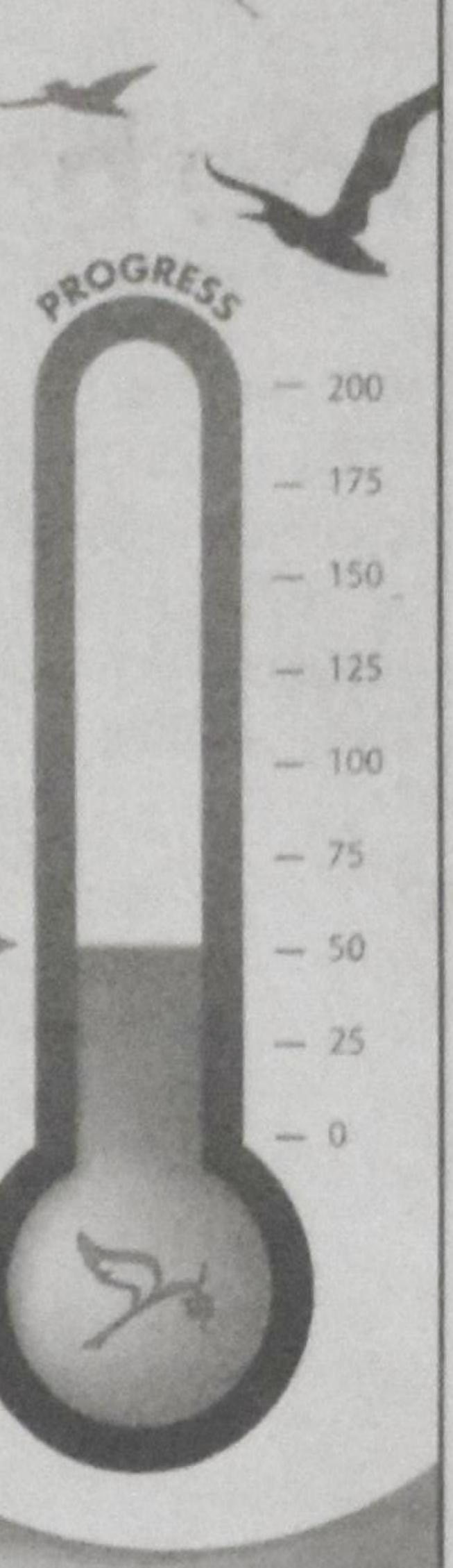
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A long tradition of loving
'strangers in our midst'

In September, *Christian Courier* published an editorial about the tough working conditions that temporary foreign workers endure ("We are all strangers," Sept. 10). "Without a doubt, there are growers who take advantage of their labourers," Leni Vander Kooij, a retired vegetable grower from Bradford, Ontario, wrote in response. "We do live in a broken world, where there is not perfection. But most farmers make their workers' lives as good as possible," and some Christians go further. She described several churches in the Holland Marsh area north of Toronto that have for years been focused on outreach that supports seasonal foreign workers.

Since 1989, Springdale Christian Reformed Church, Holland Marsh Christian Reformed Church and Nazareth Baptist have ministered together to Mexican migrant workers. The Baptists visit the workers and help with paperwork, and the Christian Reformed churches host a meal – provided and served by volunteers – and a Spanish worship service, every Sunday from June to September. Services are often followed by an English lesson or soccer game. "Every year," a Classis Toronto newsletter says, "the ministry welcomes and celebrates a few new followers of Christ." Inspired by this model, the local Catholic



Springdale CRC hosts weekly Spanish services.



church also began providing services in Spanish for Catholic Mexicans.

"So in the name of Jesus," as Vander Kooij says, they love the strangers in their midst "to the best of our ability." – Angela Reitsma Bick



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News

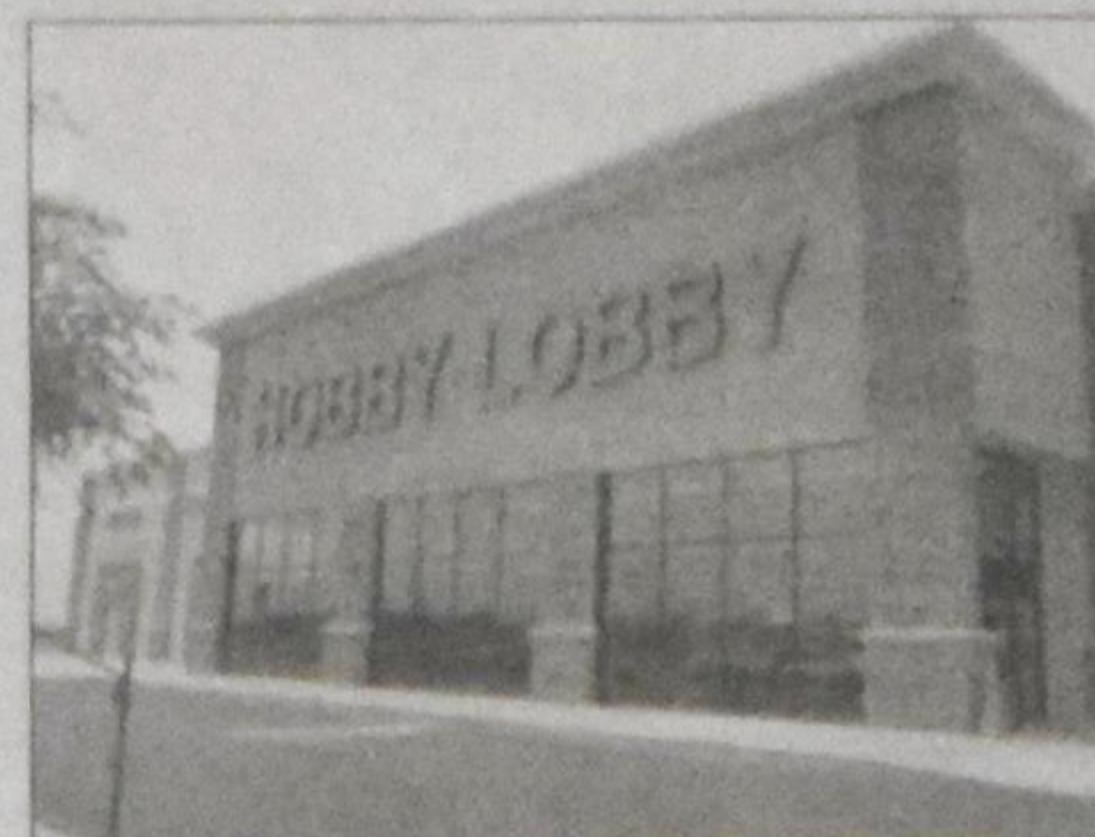
U.S.: Healthcare mandate still a contentious issue for Christians

Marian Van Til

OKLAHOMA CITY, Oklahoma – On Nov. 19 a U.S. federal judge rejected Hobby Lobby Stores Inc.'s request to block part of the soon-to-be implemented "Obamacare" law that requires employers to provide insurance coverage for potentially abortion-causing morning-after and week-after birth control pills.

In a 28-page ruling, U.S. District Judge Joe Heaton denied a request by the chain of 534 arts-and-crafts stores to prevent the government from enforcing the Health and Human Services (HHS) mandate. The mandate requires insurance coverage for abortifacients and other contraceptives which the company's evangelical Christian owners say requires them to act contrary to their faith.

The Oklahoma City-based Hobby Lobby and a sister company, Mardel Inc., sued the government in September over the HHS mandate. Lawyers for CEO and founder David Green argued that the morning-after and week-after birth control pills are tantamount to abortion because they prevent any fertilized egg from implanting in a woman's womb. Green also objects to providing coverage for certain kinds of intrauterine devices.



A Christian-owned business is 'secular'

Judge Heaton based his denial on his assertion that the Christian faith of David Green plays no defining role in his "secular" business, and thus the store should not be exempted from the mandate. He stated flatly, "Hobby Lobby and Mardel are not religious organizations." Hobby Lobby is appealing the decision.

On the other hand, also last month, U.S. District Judge Robert H. Cleland issued an injunction temporarily stopping the Obama administration from forcing Weingartz Supply Company, a family-owned outdoor-power-equipment company, to comply with the HHS mandate. The owners are Roman Catholics. The judge noted that, "Catholicism teaches that it is a sin to use, provide or otherwise support contraception," but he did not mention sterilization or abortion, which Roman Catholicism also shuns.

As in the Hobby Lobby case, an assistant attorney general acting for the Obama administration had argued that "Weingartz Supply Company is a for-profit, secular employer, and a secular entity by definition does not exercise religion."

'No conscience protection'

The Catholic bishops conference has not given up the fight over the mandate. It creates a class of people, the bishops said, "with no conscience protection at all: individuals who, in their daily lives, strive constantly to act in accordance with their faith and moral values. They, too, face a government mandate to aid in providing 'services' contrary to those values – whether in their sponsoring of, and payment for, insurance as employers; their payment of insurance premiums as employees; or as insurers themselves – without even the semblance of an exemption."

Churches are exempt from the HHS mandate, but other Christian organizations and academic institutions have been exempted only temporarily after much negative reaction to the mandate by Catholics, other Christians and practitioners of some other religions. Wheaton College, the famous evangelical institution outside of Chicago, was among 23 Christian institutions that together also fought the mandate in court. Wheaton's case was dismissed in August, and it and the others were given a year to comply with the mandate.

Meanwhile, aside from the religious liberty issue, the most pressing concern related to the highly complex healthcare law is how to pay for it. The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office now estimates that ObamaCare will cost more than \$1.76 trillion by 2022. Other estimates suggest a cost of \$2.7 trillion over the next 10 years, adding as much as \$823 billion to the U.S.'s ever-growing national debt. The law also imposes \$569 billion in new or increased taxes, most of which will come from businesses. But individuals will also end up paying more. The government's own actuaries project that future premiums will rise by 7.9 percent per year, roughly twice as fast as they would have without government-mandated healthcare.

Sistine Chapel reveals light of God, Pope says on 500th anniversary

VATICAN CITY (CNA/EWTN News) – The Sistine Chapel and its famous ceiling painted by Michelangelo celebrated its 500th anniversary on October 31, interestingly enough – Reformation Day. The ceiling was completed and the chapel dedicated just five years to the day before Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses on the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany.

The Protestant Reformation, however, was likely far from the mind of Pope Benedict as he followed in the footsteps of the medieval pope, Julius II, who originally unveiled the masterpiece by saying Vespers there. Benedict marked the anniversary of this "liturgical classroom," as he called it, with the afternoon service of Vespers in the chapel because "the works of art which decorate it, especially the frescos, find in the liturgy ... their living environment."

The Pope continued, "It is as if during the liturgical action, the entire symphony of figures comes alive, certainly in the spiritual sense, but also ... in the aesthetic sense. The Sistine Chapel, encompassed in prayer, is even more beautiful, more authentic; it reveals all of its treasures."

Benedict also reflected on what it must have been like to see the ceiling when it was first unveiled on Oct. 31, 1512. The frescoes exude light, but they are also "permeated with the idea of the light of God," the Pope observed. "That light, with its power, conquers the chaos and darkness to give life; in creation and in redemption. The Sistine Chapel tells the story of light, liberation, salvation; it speaks of God's relationship with humanity."

Vatican Museums Director Antonio Paolucci described the Sistine Chapel as having "a fatal attraction."



The world's most famous ceiling is a "liturgical classroom" for five million visitors a year.

"It is an object of desire, that essential point of arrival for migrants of so-called 'cultural tourism,'" Paolucci told *L'Osservatore Romano*.

Irreplaceable, but open to all

Despite concerns about damage caused by the presence of some five million visitors per year, Paolucci said the chapel will remain open to the public. Dust and humidity from human perspiration can harm the paintings in the long-run, but the chapel will remain open to a limitless number of visitors unless it increases "beyond a reasonable level."

In the meantime, measures will be taken to preserve the frescoes, which Michelangelo spent four years painting (1508 to 1512). "It is necessary to implement the most advanced technological provisions capable of ensuring the removal of dust and pollution, the fast and effective exchange of air, and temperature and humidity controls," Paolucci said.

No artist has achieved quite the same effect as Michelangelo, who "radically changed" the history of art, in Italy in particular, and Europe in general, said Paolucci. The likes of Michelangelo will never be seen again, he asserted, but modern art preservation techniques can keep his illuminating paintings in the Sistine Chapel forever bright.

France: Quarter million people march for marriage

PARIS (CNA) – Nearly 250,000 people across France took to the streets on Nov. 17 to voice their support for marriage against ongoing efforts by political leaders to legalize same-sex unions.

Supporters held marches in Paris, Toulouse, Lyon, Marseille, Nantes, Rennes, Metz, Dijon and Bordeaux to protest proposals by French President Francois Hollande to make same-sex unions equal to marriage.

The thousands of protestors also voice disagreement with measures to replace "father" and "mother" on official birth certificates with "Parent



A" and "Parent B."

Many carried banners with slogans such as, "Nothing better for a child than mom and dad," "No to Parent A and B: father and mother are equal and complementary," and "Children are born with a right to father and mother."

Protestors in Lyon were joined by Roman Catholic Cardinal Philippe Barbarin and the rector of the Muslim Mosque of Lyon, Kamel Kaptane, who said, "We share the same fundamental values and we should defend them together."

"Gay marriage" supporters held their own counter-protest in Lyon. That march turned violent and led to the arrests of 50 people. Some also marched semi-naked, donning religious veils with anti-Catholic slogans painted on their bodies.

During his campaign, President Francois Hollande promised to support "same-sex marriage." On Nov. 7 he sent a proposal to his cabinet members to legalize the practice.



News

Nova Scotia: Home schooling would be difficult if Ottawa agrees to new report

HALIFAX (LifeSiteNews) – Nova Scotia would become the “worst” jurisdiction in Canada for homeschooling if the government adopts a set of recommendations calling for increased oversight of families, says a homeschooling leader.

In his fall report, Auditor General Jacques Lapointe says that Nova Scotia’s Department of Education is “failing in its responsibility” to home-schooled students, and “has no way of knowing with any degree of certainty whether all these children are being educated properly, or at all.”

Lapointe called for increased monitoring and evaluation of home-schooled students, including “independent assessments.” He recommended the Department of Education make use of health records to ensure children are being registered when they reach school age.

Doesn’t fit the public school model

But Paul Faris, president of the Home School Legal Defense Association, says the report indicates Lapointe is “completely ignorant” of the research on homeschooling and is trying to fit it into a public school model.

“Nova Scotia already has a higher than average amount of regulation,” he said. “If this report went through, Nova Scotia would be the worst place in Canada to home educate.”

Currently, Nova Scotia requires a report from homeschooled students at the beginning of the year. The report must describe the projected program to be taught and must include a progress report at the end of the year. In Ontario, on the other hand, parents simply notify the gov-

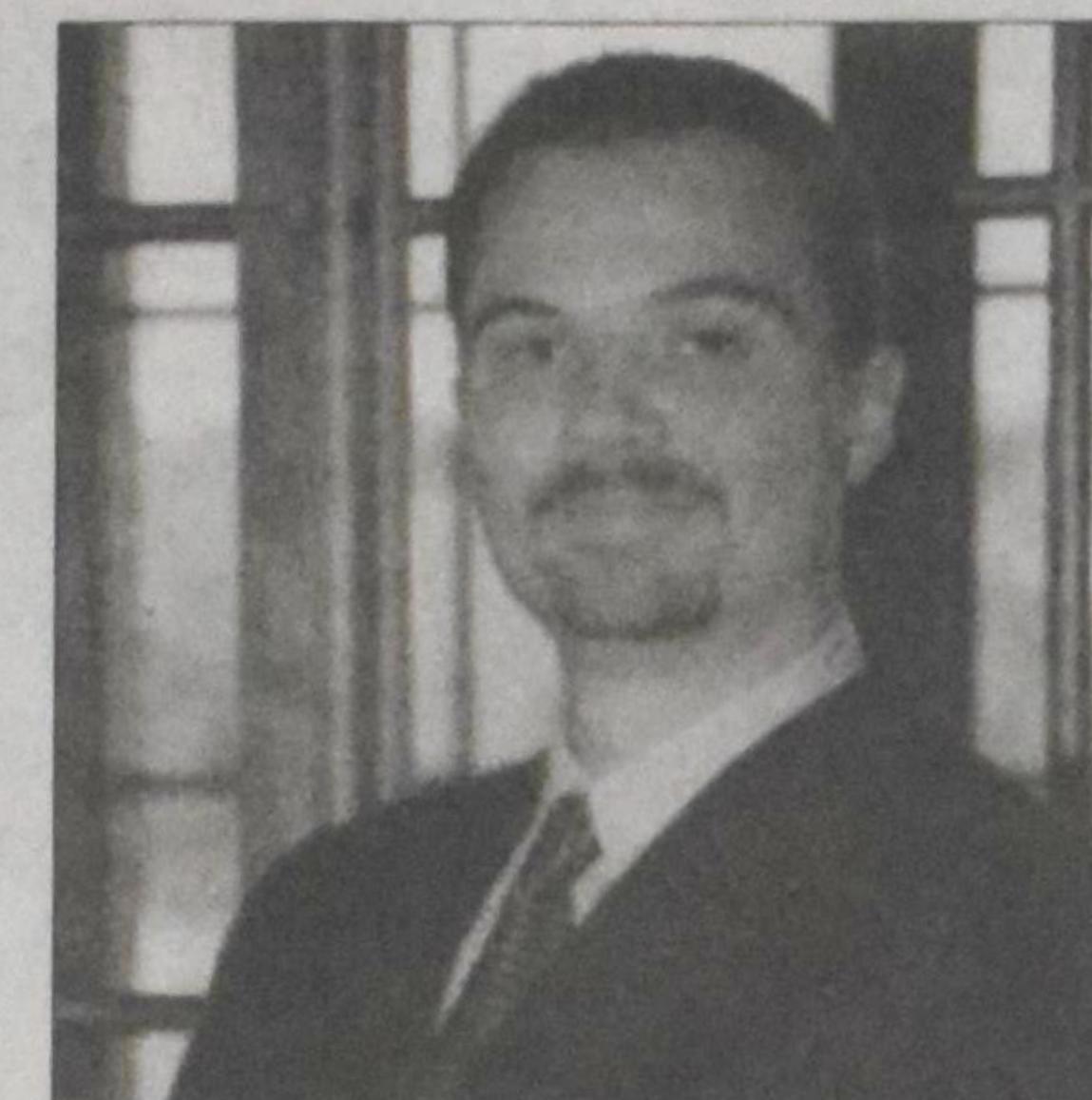
ernment that they are homeschooling, and the government presumes that they are providing satisfactory instruction.

Education Minister Ramona Jennex said she had not had a chance to read the Attorney General’s report but that the department is “open” to the recommendations and will be reviewing it. “One of the most important things is, as you know, parents have a right to make decisions about their children’s education,” she said. “It’s incumbent on us to ensure that we’re working together in collaboration with home-schooled as we go through the recommendations of the Auditor General.”

Assessments punitive or supportive?

Regarding the independent assessments, she said homeschooled students “would probably appreciate having assessments provided or worked with so that they know where their children are in terms of the outcomes that they need to be successful.”

But she added that it’s “too preliminary” to say whether



Paul Faris, president of the Home School Legal Defense Association.

such assessments would be mandatory. “I don’t look at the assessments as being punitive, I look at them as being supportive.” Jennex also said that Ottawa has no intention of preventing parents from teaching controversial moral beliefs, such as Christian teaching on homosexuality, as had been discussed in Alberta. “That’s not on our agenda.”

Faris, however, believes that independent assessments are a “terrible idea” because they would probably mean bringing children into school to write public school tests. “People home-school because their children are not doing well often on public school tests and public school curriculum,” he said. “There’s no point in testing someone on curriculum they’re not studying, right?” He said there’s no research suggesting that increased monitoring and evaluation are indicators of success for home-schooling.

Homeschooling works because the strong relationship between parent and child allows the parents to tailor the program to their children, he said. “What [Lapointe] is looking at is standardization and evaluation. And if he succeeds – which I hope he doesn’t – it will make homeschooling less successful.”

Faris continued, “Even aside from that, homeschooling’s already doing better than public. We know that the failure rate amongst home-schooled students is lower than in the public school system, so why are they focusing on homeschooling? And why are they using methods of accountability from the public school system, which has a higher failure rate?”

Report: Canadian universities fail re: free speech

CALGARY (LSN) – Canadian universities fail to protect free speech and academic freedom, according to the 2012 Campus Freedom Index.

The report, released at the beginning of last month by the Calgary-based Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms (JCCF), says that when it comes to defending Canada’s heritage of campus free speech, “the barbarians are not at the gates. They are inside the walls.”

“While the state of free speech at Canada’s public universities is stifling,” says JCCF President John Carpay, the lead author of the report, “the Campus Freedom Index seeks to empower concerned stakeholders with the factual ammunition to change the status quo in higher education.”

The 2012 Campus Freedom Index is a comprehensive report that examines the policies and actions of universities and student unions across the country to see whether they support the rights of students to express their beliefs on campus in a peaceful manner.

Using a five-tier letter scale – A, B, C, D and F – the Index grades universities and student unions on their stated policies and principles (what they say) and their actions and practices (what they do).

Student unions at the universities of Saskatchewan, Victoria, Calgary, Western Ontario, Guelph, and McGill and Lakehead universities have, for example, all banned campus pro-life groups at different times in recent years, earning them “F”s, according to the report.

The report finds that Canadian universities earn only three “A”s, but 28 “F”s for their policies and actions. The University of Toronto earned a “A” grade for its written policies but is one of 12 Canadian universities to earn an “F” for its actions.

New Brunswick’s St. Thomas University, on the other hand, ranks a “B” for policies and principles and an “A”



It's a form of censorship to ban pro-life messages from campus for actions and practices.

Open-minded if like-minded

The introduction to the Index states that one of the biggest threats to free speech in Canada comes from universities that condone illegal activities on the part of people who interfere with, and effectively shut down, the events and speeches of people with whom they disagree.

The report notes that Section 430 of the Criminal Code makes it an offence to obstruct, interrupt or interfere with any person in the lawful use, enjoyment or operation of property. “Whether universities themselves restrict controversial and politically incorrect speech, or whether they fail to uphold the rule of law on campus, in both cases the end result is censorship,” the report observes.

Moreover, the Index sheds light on the significant role that Canada’s student unions play in damaging the free speech climate on campus. In almost every case studied, it is student unions which control the registration, certification and resource allocation processes for student groups.

“In this regard it is troubling to report that ten student unions have denied official club certification to student groups based solely on the content of their message, without any misconduct on the part of the club or its members,” says the report.

The Index stipulates that to earn an “A” grade, the student union “will have spoken or acted to support freedom of expression for unpopular opinions and beliefs on campus, by rejecting demands to cancel events or otherwise suppress or censor speech. Further, an “A” student union does not advocate for political positions on provincial, federal or international issues that are not directly related to post-secondary education.”

Justifying censorship

“These results confirm what many observers have long known,” states report co-author Michael Kennedy, “that higher education in Canada has failed its duty of fostering free inquiry, critical reflection, honest debate and the pursuit of truth.”

“Universities justify their censorship on grounds of safety and security, believing that people have a right not to be offended by what they see or hear on a university campus, and believing that would-be violent protesters must be appeased by censoring unpopular messages,” states co-author John Carpay.

“The barbarians are inside the walls. Civilizing them will require a concerted effort from all stakeholders in higher education – students, parents, faculty, alumni, donors and taxpayers,” Carpay concludes.

The 15-page “Campus Freedom Index” is based on a 196-page report, “The State of Campus Free Speech in 2012,” which provides a detailed analysis of the policies and actions of each of Canada’s 35 publicly funded universities. Both reports are available on the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms website at www.jccf.ca.



Columns

Technically Speaking



The Supremacy of Christ



Derek Schuurman

The Christmas season is here. Christians remember the coming of the Christ as a baby in the manger. Even in the malls there are carols playing that tell about the birth of Jesus. The heartwarming greeting cards and nativity scenes sometime make us forget what many traditional carols actually point out: the supremacy of Christ. "Joy to the world, the Lord has come! Let earth receive her King."

The opening verses of John say this about Jesus: "He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:2-3). In Colossians we read that "The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:15-17). These passages make it clear that all things were created through Christ. What's more, the very purpose of all things is for Christ. Moreover, everything is held together in him. He is also the redeemer of all things; as the carol *Joy to the World* puts it: "He comes to make his blessings flow, far as the curse is found." Simply put, to be studying anything in creation is studying the works of Christ.

All things being held together in Christ is the theme for this year at Redeemer University College – a fitting theme for a university setting. The fact that all things are somehow "held together" in Christ is part of the deep mystery and reality of the universe. In his book, *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind*, Mark Noll suggests that "if Christ is the central and unifying theme of Scripture, then Christ should be preeminent in understanding scriptural revelation about everything else, including nature." But how does learning about Christ help us with our academic work? We often talk about God the Father and about the creation, but if Christian education is to be "Christ-centered," in what ways does Christ impact our teaching and learning?

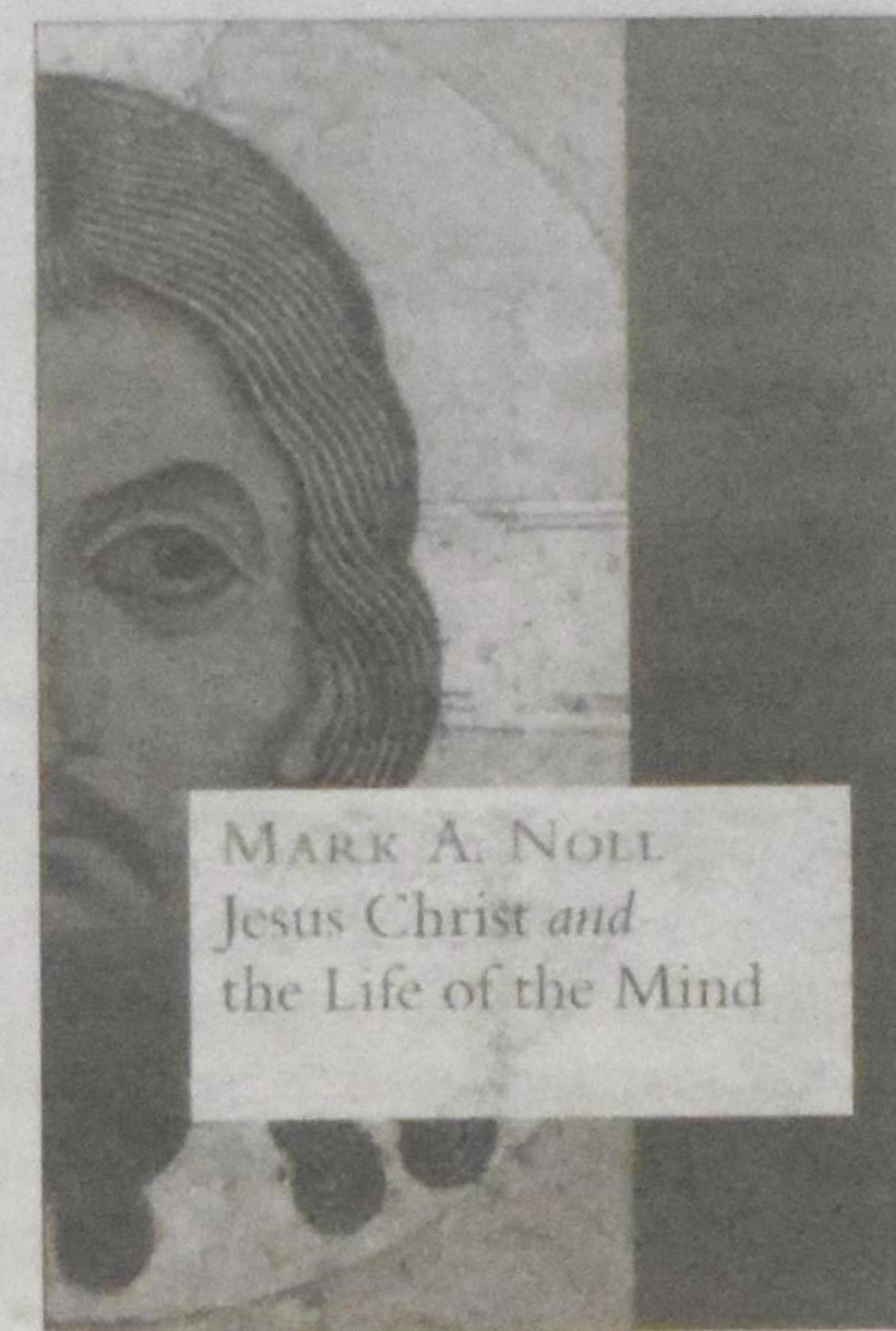
Rabbi Jesus

A recent "Teaching and Learning" workshop for Redeemer faculty explored the "All things in Christ" theme asking exactly that question: *What difference does the person and ministry of Christ make for our teaching?* Participants in a panel discussion on this topic highlighted a number of themes. First of all, we can learn some things about teaching by observing how Christ taught: he was not afraid of unresolved tensions and he often used questions to reveal complexities in the world. Jesus also focused on equipping his disciples for service, using teachable moments and practical examples. He cared for their slowness of understanding, and had compassion on the crowds. Finally, Christian teachers can also model enthusiasm for the created world, a world created and held together in Christ.

Is there also a link between Christ and technology? Some things that come to mind are the importance of using technology to show love and care to our neighbour and the importance of cultivating responsible technology. I also think about the way Jesus often retreated from the crowds to spend time in prayer, and how we also need to occasionally disconnect from electronic media to cultivate spiritual disciplines. The incarnation also shows the importance of our physical bodies, and the need for genuine communication and community beyond electronic media. As God's image bearers, we know we are distinct from robots and machines, and it is Christ who provides us with the perfect image of God (Heb. 1:3). We also acknowledge technology as part of the latent potential in creation and, in the words of Oliver O'Donovan, "the resurrection of Christ directs our attention back to the creation which it vindicates." Finally, unlike the people at Babel who tried to build a tower that "reaches to the heavens," we recognize that it is Jesus Christ who is the way, not our technology.

This Christmas, when we sing about the baby who "lay down his sweet head," let's not lose sight of the fact that he is the one in whom all things were created, and in whom all things hold together, and for whom all things were made. When we remember this, how much more wondrous is his humble birth! *Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King!*

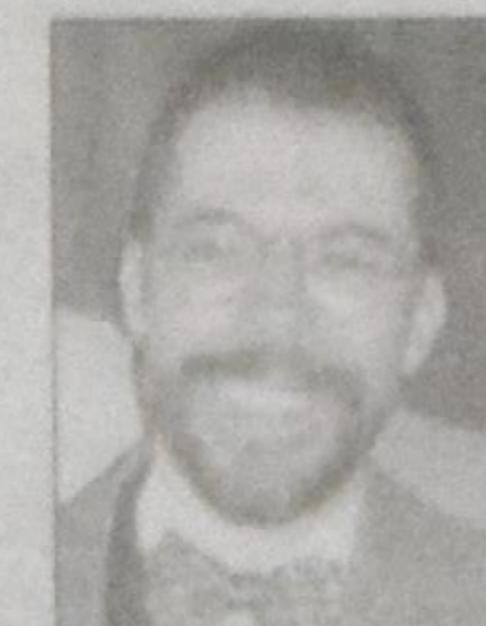
Dr. Derek Schuurman is a computer science professor at Redeemer University College. He can be contacted at dschuurman@cs.redeemer.ca.



Christ is key, Noll suggests, to scriptural revelation.

Principalities & Powers

David Koyzis



The two lives of the Virgin Mary

Jesus' mother Mary can be said to have had two lives: the one recounted with tantalizing brevity in the Scriptures and the one bequeathed to her in subsequent centuries by the church, which made her an object of veneration. Mary, of course, plays a prominent role in the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke and at the beginning of Acts.

Luke 1 recounts the visit by the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary in Nazareth, announcing that she would give birth to the promised Messiah, the one who would save his people from their sins. Although we are told that she at first questioned how this could be given her virginity, and that, in response to Gabriel's explanation, she said: "Let it be to me according to your word," we are not told much else.

This is where Mary's "second life" comes in, with later writers embroidering the biblical account with their own additions. For example, the second-century *Protevangelion of James* tells us that her parents were named Joachim and Anna (or Hannah in Hebrew). Lamenting her barrenness, Anna promises that, if God will grant her a child, she will dedicate him or her to the Lord's service in the Jerusalem temple. An angel appears to Anna and informs her that her prayers have been heard and that she will indeed bring forth a child. In a plot twist similar to that of the Old Testament story of Hannah and the child Samuel, once her daughter Mary is born and attains the age of three, Anna entrusts her to the priests at the temple.

When Mary hits puberty, the priests decide to marry her to an elderly widow named Joseph, who has children by a previous marriage. When she is sixteen years of age, she is found to be pregnant. The author of the *Protevangelion* then recounts an entirely plausible scenario in which Mary and Joseph are condemned for having secretly married without the assent of the larger community. The priests subject the distraught couple to trial by ordeal, making them drink a concoction that will harm them if guilty but will not harm them if innocent. They survive the ordeal, and the plot continues with the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem.

A blessed role-model

It is, of course, difficult to determine where these extrabiblical stories came from or how they developed. It is possible that Mary's parents were really named Joachim and Anna. Or it could be that, given the obvious literary dependence of Mary's *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55) on the much earlier song of Samuel's mother Hannah in 1 Samuel 2:1-10, a tradition began that Mary's mother was also named Hannah.

In any event, Mary's status became the subject of the Christological disputes of later centuries. In AD 431 the First Council of Ephesus declared Mary *Theotokos* (Θεοτόκος), or God-bearer, commonly rendered in English as the Mother of God. This was less a statement about Mary than an affirmation that her Son Jesus was fully God and fully man.

Indeed, in Orthodox iconography Mary is rarely portrayed without her Son, who is shown in her arms, seated on her lap or even inside a stylized circular womb, fully clothed and his head wrapped in the traditional gold halo.

The sixteenth-century Reformers continued to esteem Mary. Ulrich Zwingli, who reformed the church in Zürich, even retained the first part of the *Ave Maria* in his initial liturgy: "Hail, Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus." Recognizing its scriptural origins (Luke 1:28, 42), Zwingli argued that "the *Ave Maria* is not a prayer but a greeting and commendation."

Reformed Christians do not request



The centuries-old Virgin of Vladimir.

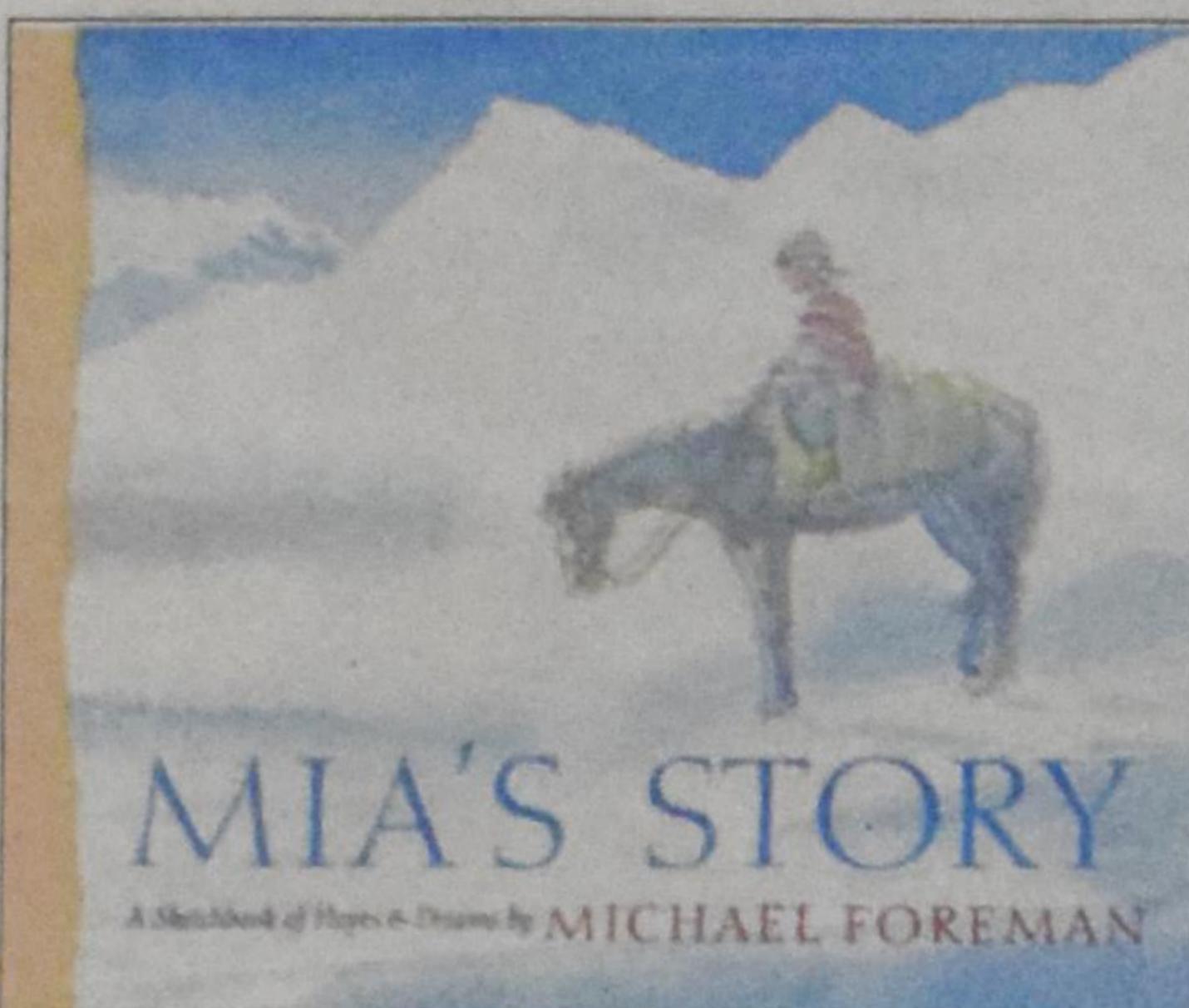
Mary's intercessions before God, primarily because Scripture is deafeningly silent on the matter. However, all Christians of whatever tradition do well to emulate Mary in her ready acceptance of God's will for her life, despite hardships incurred, and in her jubilant expression of praise: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour!"

David T. Koyzis (dkoyzis@redeemer.ca) is in his 26th year of teaching politics at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ont. He is currently seeking a publisher for his new book on authority, office and the image of God.

Reviews

Children's picture book reviews

By Sonya VanderVeen Feddema



**Mia's Story:
A Sketchbook
of Hopes & Dreams**
by Michael Foreman
Candlewick Press, 2006
Ages 4-9

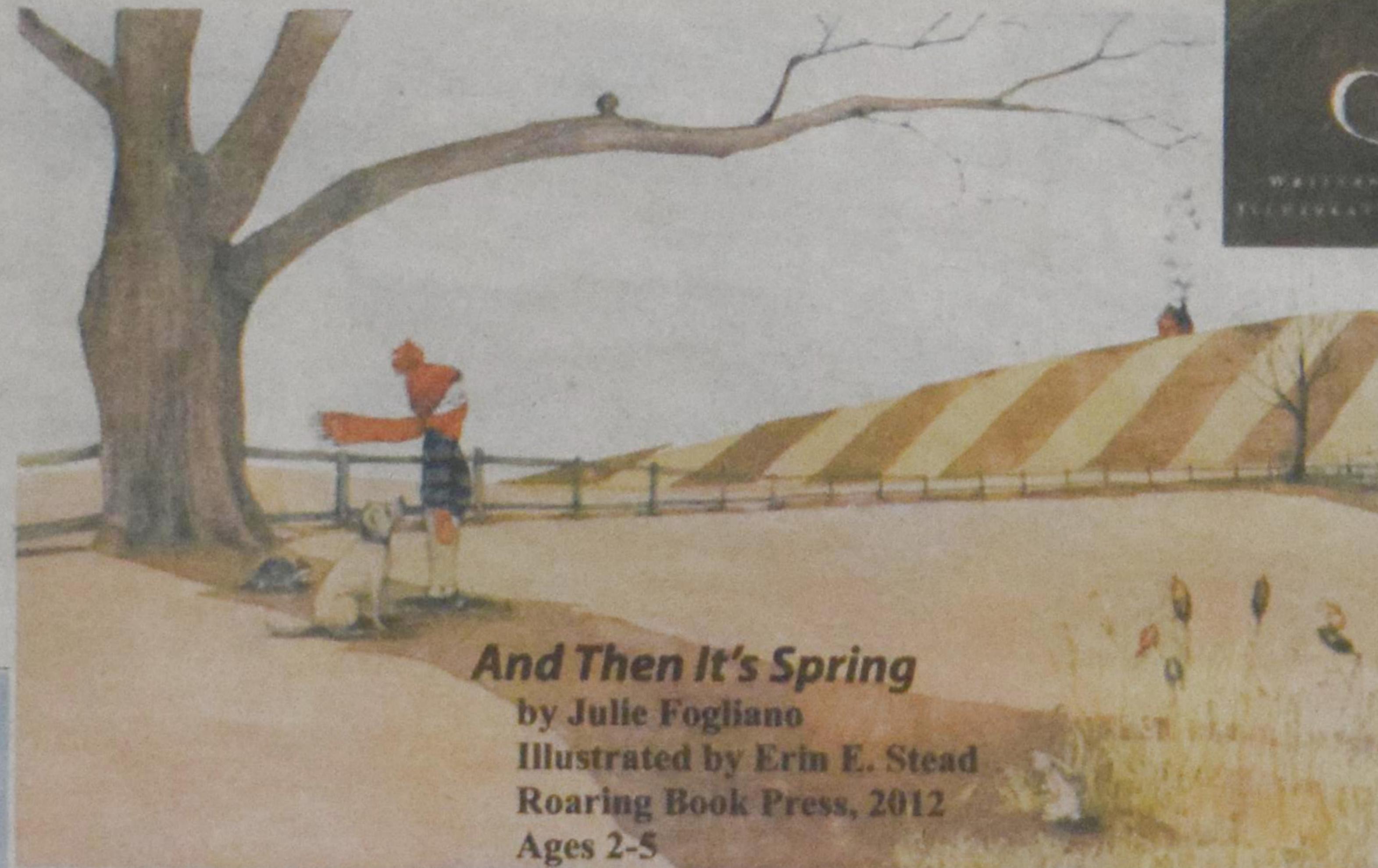
When Michael Foreman traveled from Santiago, Chile, into the Andes Mountains, he came upon a world he'd never experienced before. He writes, "I came upon what appeared to be a wasteland, a landscape of trash from the city. But a man who lived there, Manuel, showed me that it was the opposite of a wasteland. For Manuel and his fellow villagers, the trash was a crop to be harvested, recycled, and made useful once more."

While there, Foreman met Mia, a girl who lived with her parents and dog, Poco, in a house made from materials salvaged from the dump. No flowers adorned their habitat. That soon changed.

On a wintry day, Poco disappeared. When Mia set out on her horse in search of him, she failed to find him, but discovered, instead, a patch of white flowers at the base of a mountain. Mia gathered a clump of flowers, roots and all, and planted them in tin cans when she arrived at home. The flowers flourished throughout the following summer and in autumn their seeds blew all over the village. By spring, flowers covered the dump.

Though the flowers brought her joy, Mia never forgot Poco. One day as she and Papa sold flowers in the city, Mia was miraculously reunited with Poco.

In a sensitive and age-appropriate way, *Mia's Story* will open children's eyes to a world they could probably not imagine, and will show them that all people long for beauty and a secure future.



And Then It's Spring
by Julie Fogliano
Illustrated by Erin E. Stead
Roaring Book Press, 2012
Ages 2-5

After a long winter, everything outside is brown. A boy and his dog decide to change that by creating a garden. They plant seeds. And they wait. Despite rainfall, everything is still brown. The boy worries. Maybe birds ate the seeds. Or maybe a bear destroyed them by trampling over them because he was unable to read the sign: "Please do not stomp here – there are seeds and they are trying." Weeks pass. The boy and dog continue to hope. Finally, "the brown isn't around and now you have green, all around you have green."

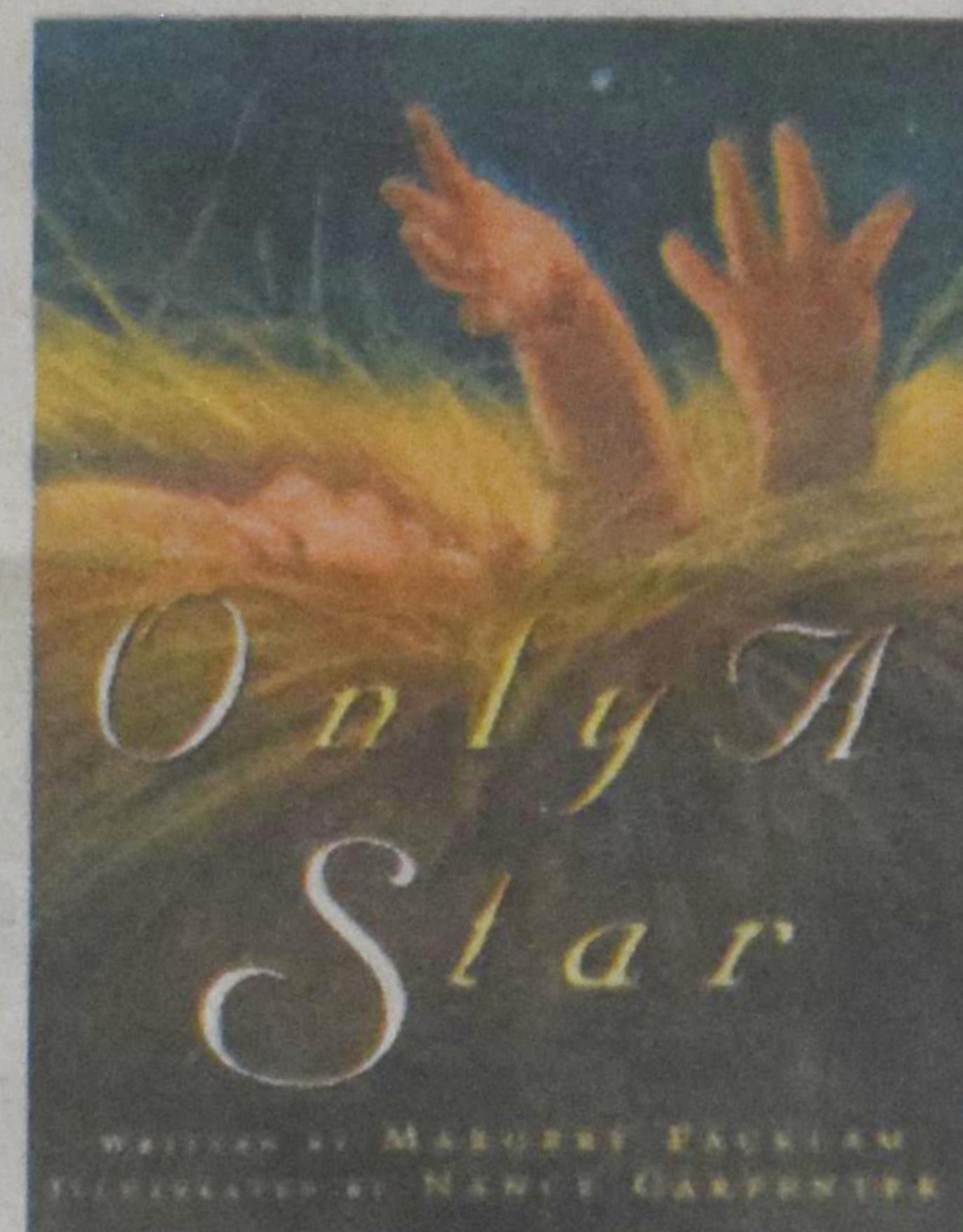
Winsome illustrations enhance a narrative filled with anticipation and longing. Children will benefit from this marvelous book, which celebrates God's creation and the joy of spring's arrival.



Red Sled
by Lita Judge
Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2011, Ages 2-5

On a snowy winter evening, a boy leaves his sled outside the door of his remote home in the woods. While he sleeps, a bear takes the sled, as a rabbit looks on. On the sled, the bear and rabbit careen wildly down the hill. Soon a moose, two raccoons, an opossum, a porcupine and a mouse join the fray, till the entire party collapses in a joyful heap at the bottom of the hill.

As the other animals look on, the bear returns the sled to where he found it. The next morning when the boy comes outside, he's puzzled by the large paw prints in the snow. So, the next night, he watches stealthily at the window and discovers the animals repeating their earlier escapades. Hilarious illustrations ensure that *Red Sled* will be relished by children and adults alike.



Only a Star
by Margery Facklam
Illustrated by Nancy Carpenter
William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996
Ages 2-6

Only a Star is author Facklam's poetic response to her granddaughter's question: "Were there any decorations on that first Christmas?" Both the simple text and the warm, earthy illustrations show how creatures that lived in Bethlehem and the vicinity during the time of Jesus' birth "decorated" the surroundings.

Dragonflies, spiders, scarab beetles, doves, donkeys, jerboas, snails and nightingales each glorified the new King in its own way. This sensitive book encourages children to use their imagination when they think about the Christ Child's birth.

King Jack and the Dragon
by Peter Bently and Helen Oxenbury
Dial Books for Young Readers, 2011
Ages 2-5

Jack, Zack and Caspar, three imaginative children, make a den for King Jack and his men out of a cardboard box, an old bed sheet, sticks, garbage bags and bricks. To finish things off, an old ragged quilt serves as a throne and a flag is erected. Now, King Jack and his brave knights are ready to do battle with vicious dragons and nasty beasts. When the vile creatures have fled, King Jack and his knights return to their den and celebrate with a feast of cookies and cupcakes.

King Jack declares that they will all sleep in the fort for the night. But a giant (Zack's dad) carries Zack off to bed, and soon another giant (Caspar's mom) carries Caspar home. Though King Jack tries to be brave, he finds his resolve weakening as the wind gusts wildly, a mouse scurries past and darkness encroaches. Suddenly, a four-legged giant appears. Terrified, King Jack calls out for his mom and dad. Miraculously, the giant he feared turns out to be two people – the protective, caring parents he loves. Tired and only slightly brave, King Jack is relieved to be carried home to his safe bed.

Heartwarming illustrations vividly capture the worlds, both real and imaginary, that children inhabit. This poetic portrayal of nurtured, emotionally healthy children and loving, protective adults is both delightful and humorous.



PETER BENTLY & HELEN OXENBURY



**and then
it's spring**

Julie Fogliano

Illustrated by
Erin E. Stead

Features

Enjoy the beauty, remember the story, hear the message

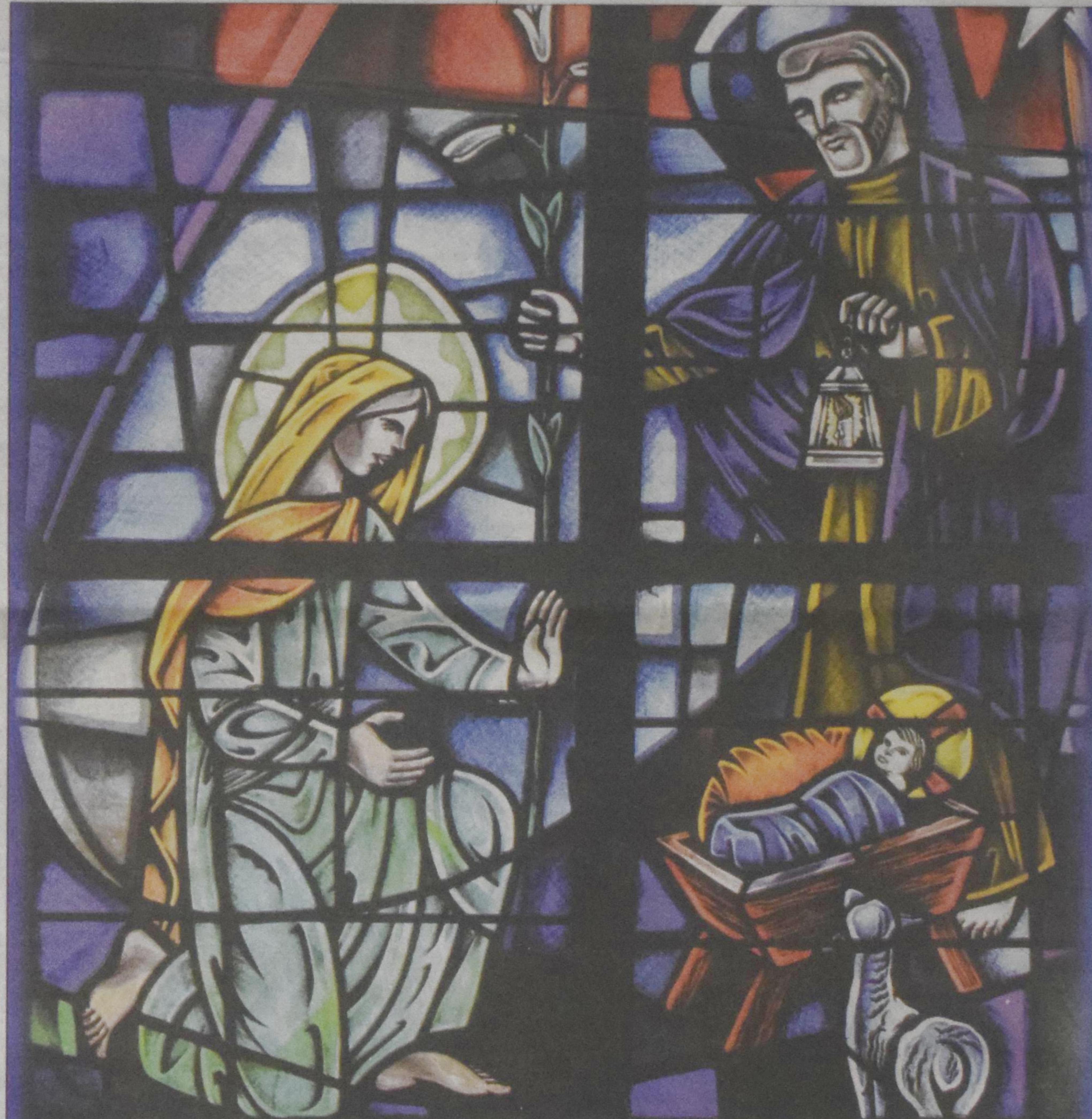
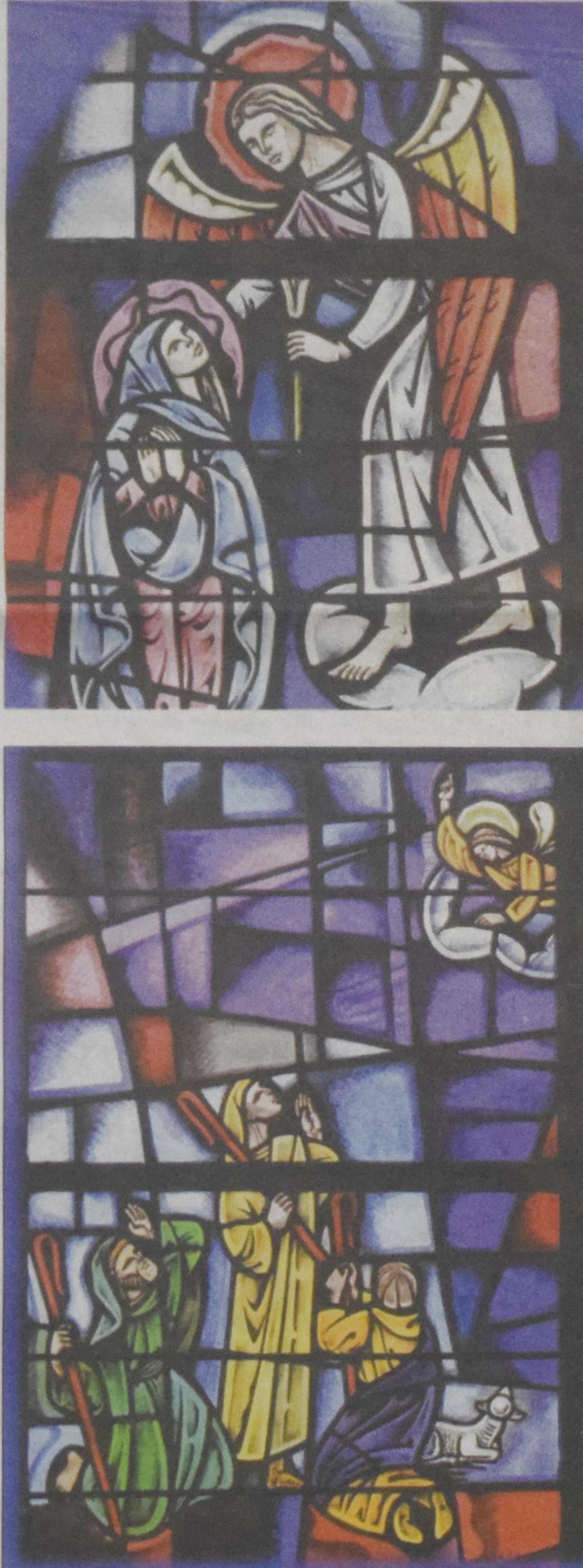
Cathy Smith

First Presbyterian Church of Belmont, North Carolina, commissioned its stained glass windows in the early 1960s at a cost of \$30,000. The Willet Studios of Philadelphia assured "the finest craftsmanship and materials" and "a thoroughly staunch and watertight job." Artist Henry Lee

Willet, president, was himself an elder in the Presbyterian Church. The designer of the windows was his employee, Marguerite Gaudin. She included whimsical elements not usually associated with ecclesiastical subjects such as fish blowing bubbles and the man in the moon sporting a benevolent smile. The construction was indeed reliable. After

Hurricane Hugo, church member George Hall ran to the church to check on the windows and was relieved to find that they had survived intact.

I had a chance to chat on the phone with Elizabeth Holm, a member of First Presbyterian since 2004, about the spiritual impact of these images.



How do the windows impact your worship and fellowship as a church community?

There's just such a sense of beauty. If you look at the windows as they go around the church, they tell the story of God, from Creation to the Resurrection promise. One side is the Old Testament story and then we continue with the New Testament story on the other side. They really wrap the church in the story of God. During children's sermons we've looked up and used the windows to bring the children into the story of God and show them their place in God's promises.

The front window, what we refer to as the Memorial Window, is a reminder of the Church Triumphant. In the centre is Christ, the Chi-Rho, and with him all the saints who have gone before us. The Chi-Rho centers our wor-

ship as we're wrapped in the story of God. That's what the windows really mean to us.

How do the windows impact your broader community?

Our church is pointed at the corner of Main and Central in Belmont. You can envision how central our physical location is in our community. The Old Testament windows face Central and the New Testament side faces Main. The Memorial window comes right out at the corner with the Chancel windows and Chapel windows below. At night, because of a very generous donation of a member, we have something that we refer to as the Dixon lights, and the Dixon lights project that story of God onto our community every night. Everyone who

Features



comes into that corner looks at the wonderful story of God. They can't **not** see it. Whether it's true to them now or will be true to them when it's revealed some day, they see the story of God every time they go by our church, particularly in the evening when those windows are lit from the inside. It's a 24/7 witness to what we believe.

The church's website (fpc-belmont.org) warmly welcomes visitors: "We hope you will enjoy the beauty, remember the story, and hear the message each image reflects." *Christian Courier* is grateful to First Presbyterian for permission to share a few of these stunning artworks with our readers.

Cathy Smith (cathy@christiancourier.ca) is features editor with CC. She lives in Wyoming, Ont.



Chaplain Sue Kuipers with Lt. Vargas in Hayward, Calif. (left). Sue at her swearing-in ceremony with her daughter, Amber Kuipers (right).



Christmas Eve in a cruiser

Sue Kuipers

Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright . . . well, maybe not so much, at least on the streets of our city. Last year, as our police department's first chaplain, I spent Christmas Eve in a patrol car – the front seat, mind you – riding with Team 3, the swing shift. The night was not so silent when dealing with calls about loud parties and family fights, and not so holy when facing an angry crowd or watching an officer remove drugs and burglary tools from a suspect's car.

The briefing at the start of the shift contains a lot of good-natured teasing among the team members, directed especially towards one officer whose birthday falls on Christmas Day. As we adjourn, I ask for a volunteer to let me ride along and he offers to take me. When I ask at which car I should meet him, he replies: "the one with the shiny lights on top." I knew I was in for an interesting evening.

Usually, at the beginning of a ride-along, the officer and I review a few logistics such as where I will be during traffic stops – outside the vehicle, behind the ballistic paneled door – and my role in dealing with the public (for example, distracting children while officers deal with the adults in domestic calls). Often the officer reviews with me what to do in an emergency such as how to use the radio, how to release and fire the shotgun, where to run to, etc. As we leave the police yard, I remember an article I'd read earlier in the day that said that statistically Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and New Year's Day are the deadliest in terms of line of duty deaths for police officers. Riding with the police has definitely increased the frequency and urgency of some of my prayer times!

With Christmas music playing on the radio, we head out to begin patrolling the "G" beat. After a few routine traffic stops, most of which get off with just a warning, we hear a call for "officer needs assistance" and we take off with wailing sirens and flashing lights, racing through streets amid holiday traffic and way too many red lights. I double-check to make sure my seat belt is fastened since I can't feel it when I'm wearing a ballistics vest. I've learned not to look at the speedometer during these times . . . I just don't want to know.

We follow pretty much the same pattern throughout the rest of the shift. There are moments of comedy such as when we discover the "stolen" car parked on the other



Sue's chaplain badge.

side of the mall from where the owner was sure he left it. Moments of frustration, trying to calm crying children as officers deal with supposedly adult family members who can't put aside their differences for one day and make nice. Moments of hopelessness as we talk to drug addicts, thieves and prostitutes who appear to be stuck in their issues like hamsters on a wheel.

Then there are the quiet times between calls. My officer tells me about his family, the joys and frustrations of his job, and the painful memories of critical incidents that haunt him. He's not sure how much longer he'll continue in this occupation; its demands are draining his strength and crushing his soul. It has cost him his marriage and his health and he is determined to not sacrifice his relationship with his children on its altar of stress.

As the clock turns over to 2400 hrs (midnight), I wish him a "Happy Birthday." Moments later various members of his team and dispatchers also send along birthday greetings as well as proclamations of "Merry Christmas" to each other. Things settle back to normal as we pursue an apparent drunk driver. The night ends with taking the driver and his passenger to jail.

On this not-so-silent night, where "calm and bright" is replaced with "fear and darkness," there are still glimpses of holiness to be found. I knew it would be there, because it always is. God's presence is not thwarted by human folly.

I think it is found in such moments as when grace is extended to the homeless person given a ride to a shelter for a hot meal and a bed for the night. It's in the compassion of the officer who waits patiently with the woman whose husband is dying in the ER, so that she won't be alone when the bad news comes. It's even in the seemingly harsh words spoken to the prisoners in the back of the patrol car, urging them to make better choices and in so doing preserve their lives. It's found in the simple fact that, whether they recognize it or not, these men and women who take on the demands of law enforcement live out the biblical principle that peace demands sacrifice.

Sue Kuipers is an associate pastor at Christ's Community Church in Hayward, Calif., where she ministers as both a youth pastor and a law enforcement chaplain.



Features

Witnesses

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Charuni adjusted her turquoise hijab, then leaned toward her friend Sara in the waiting room chair beside her, and said quietly, "Four witnesses, including herself. That is how many a woman needs."

Sara reached momentarily for the younger woman's hand — white clasping brown — and glanced across the room at the Victim Services sign, draped in cheery red and green tinsel.

Witnesses, Sara thought. Where did I hear about witnesses lately?

Charuni's four-year-old son Bakri ran a small red fire truck up and down the slope of her slender blue-jeaned legs and over her salt-grimed boots. She tousled his curly hair and smiled at him, then suddenly remembered Pastor Ron's Advent sermon from last week. While she had sat, anchored between her husband and ten-year-old daughter, their other four children filling the pew on either side of them, Pastor Ron had mentioned that the Bethlehem shepherds were considered unreliable witnesses.

"Four witnesses," Charuni repeated. "In Sudan, if you go with another woman to a judge to speak against a man, the judge will say to you, 'Why are you here? You are only half a man.'" Charuni paused. "Where will I ever find three other witnesses?"

Two days ago, Charuni had phoned Sara, frantic. Skidding on ice, Sara's van had barely averted a hydro pole as she sped to her refugee friend's apartment building. Inside, she dialed Charuni's code, then, with a click, the smudged-glass door unlocked. She tapped her foot impatiently as the smelly elevator lumbered up to the seventh floor. She knocked. Charuni opened the scratched steel door. Sara embraced her, then led her around a splintered kitchen chair, its dowels jutting like spears. They sat on the black leather couch, a gold-framed picture of an open Koran on the wall behind it. By then several hours had passed since Nijam's rage had erupted, again, after all the other blows, whacks and stranglings that had littered Charuni's ten years of marital bondage. Two police officers had come and gone in search of Charuni's husband, her elder by thirteen years.

Charuni had cried and talked. Sara had listened, till Bakri had come into the living room and said, "Mommy, I want to tell Sara about Daddy."

Charuni had smiled sadly. "It is how he is dealing with it," she said. "Three times he told the police officers what happened." Charuni nodded at Bakri.

Sara lifted the brown-eyed boy on her lap and embraced his warm body, feeling his ribs, delicate, a vulnerable cage protecting his heart. "What do you want to tell me?" she asked.

Solemnly Bakri said, "Daddy yelled at Mommy. Then Daddy broke the chair. Then Daddy hit Mommy in the stomach. Then Mommy yelled." Bakri turned to Charuni and said, "I don't remember what you



yelled, Mommy. What did you yell?"

Charuni looked down at her lap and whispered, "Not this one, too."

Bakri took a deep breath. "Yes, that's what Mommy said. Then Daddy hit Mommy in the mouth. Then Daddy ran outside. Then Mommy phoned the police. Then two policemen came. And that's it." Bakri jumped off Sara's lap and ran to his bedroom.

Now, at Victim Services, Charuni and Sara waited for the social worker to call Charuni into the office for her appointment.

One person equals one witness

"It's not like that here in Canada," Sara said reassuringly. "One person equals one witness."

Bakri looked up from the floor. "Mommy, I want to tell Sara about . . ." His voice trailed off. Charuni looked at him questioningly. He jumped up and whispered in her ear. She nodded.

Bakri pointed at Charuni's waist. "Mommy has a baby in there," he said happily. "I'll be a big brother." He jumped up and down. "Big brother! Big brother!" he shouted.

A hefty woman spilling over onto two connected seats grunted, "Can't you shut that kid up?"

Sara grimaced.

Charuni sighed and said quietly, "He is hard to manage after what he saw."

High heels clacking on the tile floor announced a woman, tall and broad-shouldered, her hoop earrings swinging rhythmically. "Charuni," she said, glancing first at the heavyset woman, then at Charuni and Sara.

Charuni glanced at Sara warily, the same look she'd given her as they had entered the court house earlier

that morning on their way to Victim Services and saw the clean-shaven police officers, guns in holsters, who guarded the entry, asking for identification and searching their purses. Then Charuni's breath had come in short gasps. She had bowed her head and wiped her wet cheeks, and whispered, "I've never done this before."

Now she grabbed Sara's wrist and pleaded, "They won't believe me. What if Nijam talked to them first? They will believe him! He is a man!"

Sara winced. What else could a woman think, or do, or be when all of her life her witness was reduced to a quarter of a man's?

"Charuni," the social worker said again.

Sara stood up and extended her hand. "My name is Sara," she said. "This is my friend, Charuni."

"Pam Watson," the woman replied.

Charuni slowly rose from her chair. "Hello," she said apprehensively.

"I'll watch Bakri while you talk to Pam and the lawyer," Sara said.

Charuni hugged Bakri, then left the room with Pam. Bakri returned to his fire truck. Soon, though, he thrust it aside and whined, "I want Mommy."

"She needs to talk to that lady,"

Sara said. "She'll be back soon. Do you want to draw some pictures while we wait?" Sara went to a shelf and picked up blank paper and a tattered box filled with crayons, and brought them to a low table. She eased down into the tiny yellow chair as Bakri sat on a bright purple one.

Bakri chose a red crayon. He chewed his lip as he pressed the crayon down hard on the paper. It snapped.

"Oh, oh," he said, as he looked up at Sara, worried.

"It's all right," Sara said. "Now there are two crayons. Just use one."

Soon an oval with eyes and a mouth appeared on the paper. Then Bakri added stick arms and legs, protruding from the oval.

"Who is that?" Sara asked.

"My baby brother."

"You want your mommy to have a boy baby?"

"I do! Baby boy!" He jumped up from his chair and ran around the table, shouting, "Boy! Boy!"

"Shut that kid up!" the large woman said as she wearily shifted her weight.

Sara ignored her, as Bakri sat back down beside her.

"Bakri, what if your mommy has a girl?" Sara asked.

Boys are better

"Boys are better!" Bakri shouted. "Daddy said so."

Sara imagined what Bakri's future might be. Bakri, a childhood witness to his father's fierce fists and kicking feet, possibly hitting his own wife in the privacy of their bedroom, or living room, or bathroom. Thinking it was his right.

Bakri looked at Sara, confused. She watched his troubled face as he seemed to turn a question over and over in his mind — Mommy, a girl? Mommy, a girl?

"Do you love your mommy?" Sara asked.

"I love my mommy this much," Bakri said as he drew a big red circle around his drawing of the baby. He folded up the paper and squeezed it tightly in his fist. "It's a present for Mommy," he said happily.

"A good present!" Sara said.

"Do you have a present for Mommy?" Bakri asked.

Sara thought for a moment. Yes, she did have a present, but how could she explain its essence to Bakri? She would continue to be a friend to this family for years to come, no matter what happened next. As much as possible, she would watch over Bakri's life and the life of his baby sister — for surely the ultrasound a month ago had announced the presence of a female, the second victim of Nijam's rage when he had learned of her existence, a victim who had escaped, unlike the others. Sara would be a witness, telling Charuni, Bakri and the precious girl-child the good news story of Bethlehem shepherds, whom God had elevated to prime witness status, and the baby boy they had announced.

Bakri looked at Sara expectantly. "Do you have a present for Mommy?" he repeated.

"I do," Sara said. "But it's a surprise." ↗

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema (sonyavf55@hotmail.com) is a freelance writer living in St. Catharines, Ont.



Columns



Faith sharpens our vision so that we can see the great and mighty works of God.

Intangible Things

Heidi Vander Slikke



We attended Mrs. Been's 95th birthday party in February. With her bright smile and positive attitude I thought she might very well live to see 100. But over the last several months she experienced some health issues. A few weeks ago her son and daughter-in-law took her home with them to look after her. Days later she was hospitalized. She would not return to her own apartment.

We stood at her graveside on a cold, bright November morning. The pastor read scripture. He commented that as we drove away from the cemetery we might feel as if we were abandoning Mrs. Been. But he reminded us that these were only her earthly remains. Her heart and soul were already with Jesus, awaiting the day of resurrection.

As the casket was lowered into the vault I could see the sorrow on her grandsons' faces. Her two great-grandsons, ages four and two, stepped forward, each clutching a red rose. "To remember Gamma," the older boy had told me earlier. He laid the flower on the casket. His little brother reluctantly did the same, although he had to think about whether he really wanted to leave it there.

Over lunch we reminisced about the life and times of Mrs. Been and chatted about what a beautiful day it was.

Later, at the memorial service in Holland Christian Homes, the choir Mrs. Been had been part of sang songs which she loved. Her son gave a tender eulogy. The pastor preached on Psalm 73, emphasizing verse 24: "You guide me with your counsel and afterward you will take me into glory."

From a human point of view this was as good as it gets. Here was a lady dearly loved by many. She lived a full life – 95 ½ years, mostly in good health and with amazing vitality. She had known enough struggle and heartache to give her depth of character and strong faith. She had loyal friends and a loving family. She had seen two great-grandsons, and a great-granddaughter who bears her name. Even her desire to remain independent as long as possible had been fulfilled.

The whole story

And yet, it was a bittersweet day.

On the way home my mother-in-law said, "Funerals always remind us of our mortality." How

As good as it gets?

true. The grass withers, the flower fades and our place remembers us no more. As beautiful as life can be, it is fleeting. It slips away on us from the very moment we're born. Thank the Lord there's more to the story. There is "afterward."

At home I snipped the stem of the white rose given to me by Mrs. Been's daughter-in-law and placed it in a budvase beside the memorial card.

I thought of a passage I had read earlier in the week. "Call to me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things which you did not know" (Jer. 33:3b, NKJV). My mind wandered with these words spoken to God's people in the midst of exile.

"Call to me," he says. Think of it! *Call to me. I am the source of life, now and forever. I am the reason you exist. I am your only hope. I ordain your next breath. Use it to call to me. Go ahead. Ask me questions. I am knowledge. I created everything. Before I spoke it into being I knew exactly how it would all work out, including you and all the days I have in mind for you. So go ahead – call to me. Ask me. Trust me.*

"I will show you great and mighty things which you do not know." *I will show you things so magnificent, so amazing, so baffling that you could never have imagined them. I will show you a baby in a manger, born to a virgin, adored by angels and hunted by a ruthless king. I will show you One who is fully human and fully divine, loved by the Father and despised by humanity, yet willing to die for their sake. I will show you the terror of flesh and blood crucified – the flawless sacrifice poured out for your sake. This is love beyond your understanding, streaming down the ancient beam and soaking the soil of Calvary. The flow is eternal, unconstrained by time or space. I will show you the empty tomb and the promise of Easter morning.*

You could not know these things. Your vision is blurred, your comprehension limited. But ask me. I will show you. I will give you eyes of faith. I know the whole story. I wrote it. And it includes a place in heaven for you.

As good as it gets? No. For the believer, the best is yet to come.

Heidi Vander Slikke (hmvanderslikke@hotmail.com) lives in Harriston, Ont.

ARTFUL EYE



Simone Martini, Detail from The Annunciation with St. Margaret and St. Ansanus, 1333.

SILENT NIGHT
– for Marjorie Maddox

The holly bush stands by the peeling door
she stumbled through last night, under the stare
of curious eyes. She didn't make it far

beyond the first stall, so she lay down there
to let her body have its way with her.
Rubbing her back, he braced himself against the door.

Maybe she wished that she could give it up –
the greeting of the angel on her stoop,
her yes, the thousand future paintings. She would swap

it all to stop this lava. Not to erupt
with God. To halt the bleeding of the Infinite
into that barn. Peaceful? Silent? It was abrupt,

loud, violent. She was blown apart. Body went
one way, she went another. Just to keep her blunt
place in the world, she sent her eyes hunting

the holly: that woman, sister, aunt, waiting
patiently outside to help. As God came ripping
through – a wild train – her eyes kept holding

that tree. She rests now. Wind is leaking
into the barn, the animals are sleeping.
Outside, the holy holly bough is breaking.

~ Jeanne Murray Walker

Jeanne Murray Walker is a poet and professor at the University of Delaware. "Silent Night," from her book *New Tracks, Night Falling* (Eerdmans, 2009), is reprinted here with permission. Her newest work, a memoir entitled *Geography of Memory: A Pilgrimage through Alzheimer's*, will be available next year. Her website is www.JeanneMurrayWalker.com.



Columns

Roots and Wings



Emily Cramer



As I sit down to write, again my eye is caught by the out-of-doors. Drawing to the end of the year, the scarlet autumn vines now hang limp from my fence and summer's rich gardens lie sodden; the world around me grows cold and dark, repeating its sad story. We are in the graveyard of the life cycle, a season that illustrates ending, death, silence. Often at this time of year, nature's sadness is echoed in me as I struggle with the loss of daylight, the lack of colour, the idea of a long winter ahead. But just as darkness is about to have the last word of the year, a light is struck, reminding us of hope. Out come candles, glittering trees, ropes of twinkle lights – just when we need them most. Even secular culture adopts Christmas in this perennial longing for light in the deep darkness of the year. When the gloom of late autumn descends, all I have to do is pull out a Christmas CD or one of my favourite cookie recipes, and my mood is lifted.

This year, my family has an added reason to celebrate the season: the baby's first birthday. When we brought her home from

The season of birth

the hospital last December, I had the eye-opening experience that must be shared by many parents of December babies – new insight into the reality of Jesus as an infant. My daughter arrived naked, hungry, cold, without possessions or identification, stranger to the local language, stranger even to us. She was vulnerable in every way a person can be, and without constant, vigilant care, she would literally not have been able to live. This tiny human being's total vulnerability has struck me again and again throughout this first year. It is an awesome responsibility and a beautiful nurture-meets-need symbiosis if it plays out in love as it was intended. There are few sorrows greater than an unloved, uncared-for child, utter helplessness being met with disinterest or neglect. We sense, at the core of ourselves, that a child's need is meant to – ought to – find corresponding nurture.

An unpretentious God

Then I think of the Christ child, Jesus, very God, born into the same state of total need as my daughter. Of course this astounding humility tells us about the character of the God we worship: Master

of the Universe literally descending into diapers, unable to communicate, able only to receive. What amazes me even more is *who* he made himself vulnerable to: *us*, the very ones who were going to kill him in the end. If he had arrived armoured with an army of angels to redeem his fallen people, it would seem proportionate. But he came naked, cold, unprotected, and placed himself in our hands. I have trouble being vulnerable even to my loved ones, those I have every reason to trust. My daughter's vulnerability touches me so deeply because it is so far removed from the self-protection I've created. Many of us spend our adult lives working hard to maintain self-sufficiency and fearing the returning helplessness of old age. And here is God, in all his fullness, laid bare before a world that is imminently *not* trustworthy in its servanthood to sin. That is humility to aspire to. That is a God without pretension or ego, only love and our best interest at heart.

And so, Christmas is the beginning of hope. Although death is still coming, the last word in the Christ-cycle is rebirth and life everlasting. This is the story that undergirds all our stories, that is enacted in



Coming to earth as a baby shows God's true humility.

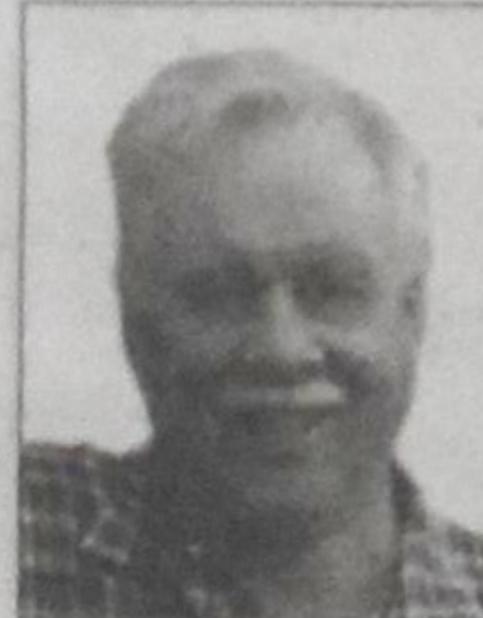
the backyard each season, that brings us back to Christmas year after year. In our bones, we want life to win and we cling to symbols that whisper that it might, it *will*. The candles and tinsel and lights remind us of life, the baby born in the winter darkness makes life possible, even dead vines in the backyard become symbols of the life that is coming, just around the corner. Glory to God. ▶

Emily Cramer lives in Barrie, Ont. with her husband and daughter and teaches in the Liberal Arts department at Georgian College. She is being intrigued and challenged by Rob Bell's Love Wins.

Country Living



Meindert Vander Galien



A group of volunteers want every child in Ottawa to open a gift on Christmas Day. A spokesperson for the Toy Mountain organization said 16,000 children in Ottawa wouldn't get a toy this Christmas if it wasn't for their work and support from the community. "Christmas is all about children," he said on the news. "Their eyes light up when opening a gift and their smiles are so wonderful to see."

It is wonderful to see happy children. But they need a lot more than just a gift at Christmas. Christmas is not about children; adults made it that way.

For 15 years I have been involved with a project called "Farm Comes to Town" in our county. One day in April, 400 or so Grade Five kids from our county are bused to a large arena at the Renfrew Fairgrounds, where seven farm stations are set up and manned by farm volunteers. Groups of students spend 20 minutes at each station on the half-day visit: either morning or afternoon. Children love animals; they laugh, smile or look in amazement when they get to stroke a calf, lamb or piglets; or when they see a sheep being shorn and cows being milked. The classes fill out an evaluation on what they learned, liked and disliked. I always enjoy reading through these stacks of papers, and I've compiled some of the funniest lines that the kids said. Some of them need to come again, as you can see from the comments. Enjoy!



When the farm comes to town, we find out how much city kids know about animals.

I found out how to tell if the egg is worth the money or not.—Jason

I liked watching the cows eat her grains, because I thought cows only eat hay.—Joel

I learned that when a mother pig wants to feed her young she gives a certain snort.—Erika

A chicken lays a small egg, then it grows.—Grace

I never knew that pork is a kind of meat.—Ethan

I really liked the middle-aged pigs.—Ashley

I liked seeing what pigs eat so I know what I eat.—Nicholas

I found out that farmers don't milk cows by hand much anymore.—Meaghan

I learned that you have to soak the tits before milking it.—Kelsea

I liked how the worker bees kill the Queen if she is too old or lose interest.—Kaitlyn

I found out that pigs have children with different colours.—Chelsey
Two chickens can't mate.—Megan

I liked the beef station because meat is mostly what I eat. I also liked the poultry station because once every week I get eggs and toast.—Cody

I learned that chocolate coloured cows don't give chocolate milk.—Lisa
If you don't check the eggs you might get a chick in one.—Josh

I learned that some female beef cows don't go and get slaughtered.—Christine

Records and erasers have some swine in them.—Renee

There was one thing that surprised me. I didn't think bees lived on a farm.—Aaron

You don't milk beef but make leather out of him.—Samantha

When the baby pig is 1 or 2 weeks old the baby has to get the tail chopped off because when a pig gets bored it likes to chew on things.—Thomas

Pork interested me because the big skins make good leather.—Kayla

I thought beef came from a pig, but no, it was from a different animal.—Kyle

It was cool when you milked a cow because my grandma had cows and just used her hands.—Erika

When you have a dairy cow you keep it and get the milk, but one day you get another kind of dairy cow then you can either give away the other dairy cow or say one word: "HAMBURGER."—Rachael

Hens sing before they lay eggs.—Aaron

I never knew corn flakes actually had corn in them.—Gwen

Chickens can give you the evil eye.—Tracey

When winter comes the girl bees throw the boy bees out of the hive.—Katie

I liked the woman who spinned the sheep fur to make mittens. Does she make a lot for Christmas?—Sara

Woolen mittens as a Christmas gift! How wonderful! Have a Blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year! ▶

Meindert van der Galien is a Renfrew County farmer and agriculture writer and now does the church bulletin.

Columns

Christ @ Culture

Lloyd Rang



Praying for a white Christmas

I admit it.

Christmas secretly fills me with dread.

And I wish I had a conventional dread of Christmas. I wish I could say I was only worried about whether or not my loved ones will like their presents. If I had the kind of family that quietly seethed at each other over Christmas dinner – or even the kind that got into a full-blown Animal-house style turkey-leg chucking food fight – that would be a nice change of pace. And I'd love – LOVE – to just fuss about the symmetry of my tree.

The truth is, while I do worry about some of those things, they're not the source of the dread that stalks me, relentlessly, day after day like some Terminator robot in a Santa hat.

I dread a green Christmas.

And not because I like the sentimentality of the snow-covered landscapes. Not because I buy into some Bing Crosby version of the holiday season filled with sleigh-bells. Not once in 43 Christmases has there been even a whiff of chestnuts roasting on an open fire.

I dread a green Christmas because I remember seasons.

I remember when it used to get cold towards the end of October and there was a good chance the first snowfall would happen before Halloween.

I remember when November meant you'd wear a sweater and a heavy coat.

And I remember that, while the snow didn't always stay around for Christmas, it always made an appearance before December 25. And by January, there was ice in the backyard and you were skating.

An undeniable truth

Tonight – on November 20 – I went out shopping with my coat wide open and a tee shirt on underneath, and it was foggy out. Inside the store, it seemed strange to see Christmas decorations because, outside, it felt like a nice September evening.

Something very bad is happening.

And while I can pretend I don't see it in the middle of the summer, or in the early fall on a sunny day, when Christmas is approaching and there has been no cold weather at all, the only shiver I feel is the one travelling up my spine.

Because it means that the models are correct. The scientists are correct. To paraphrase Michael Moore: "We all love sunshine, but if the sun rose at midnight tonight, we'd all know that something was horribly wrong."

At Christmas – the one day in the winter



that all of us can remember and compare from year to year – the truth is especially undeniable. Our world is warming.

Now there are those who will say they welcome global warming. It means no snow shoveling, they say. It means Southern Ontario will be more comfortable.

Scientists – ever the people to ruin an opinion with facts and figures – say otherwise.

Global warming means hotter summers with more heat stress on crops and native plants and animals. The lack of seasonal ice and snow in the Great Lakes watershed means no spring melt, which means rapidly declining water levels and drought. Economists can't agree on the exact cost, but they estimate that adapting to climate change and dealing with extreme weather events has already cost Ontario billions.

Selective vision

These days, fewer and fewer people deny climate change is real, and that humans are to blame. At last count, 98 percent of Canadians agree with our scientists. But we're divided on what to do about it. Most of us just shrug and go on shopping and driving and spending as we always have.

Many of these people are Christians. Which baffles me.

After all, we're people who should understand complex cause-and-effect.

We have no trouble making the connection – through countless generations – between King David and Jesus. We can draw a straight line from the promise to Abraham and the birth in the stable through millennia of ancient, barely recorded history. We have no difficulty wrapping our heads around the notion that the promise to redeem the world came at the Fall and is still being worked out today.

And yet we can't be bothered to connect the dots between the clear-cutting of the planet's CO₂-breathing forests, the burning of fossil fuels, out of control consumerism, the slow death of life in the oceans, coal-fired electricity, shopping for cheap Chinese goods at Wal-Mart, and the rise in atmospheric greenhouse gasses – connections that are alive and active and happening right before our eyes, right now.

And, even if we do recognize the problem, we can't be bothered to take action to clean up the mess we're leaving behind for our kids and grandkids.

It seems we don't care.

That's what really scares me.

And each year why I pray – desperately – for a white Christmas.

Lloyd Rang (Lloyd.rang@rogers.com) lives in Bowmanville, Ont.

Many Christians feel called to serve God through environmental stewardship, yet are overwhelmed by the enormity of the issues facing us today. This is the first in a three-part series that offers practical, concrete steps towards improving our care of creation.

Stewardship by the numbers
Part I: Water conservation

Jordan Hoogendam

The Conference Board of Canada places Canada very poorly, as 15 out of 16 first-world countries (only just slightly ahead of the USA), for how inefficiently we use water. Canadians, on average, use close to 300 litres of water per person per day.

The first step in becoming good stewards of creation is to reduce what we are using before looking for alternative sources of collecting; in other words, conservation before generation. In my view, the single most critical issue impeding us from conserving water is the value we place on it as a resource. In Canada, we typically pay less than half of what it actually costs to pump and treat the water we use. We don't see the actual cost of water because municipal water systems are heavily subsidized through taxpayer dollars.

Let's look at the numbers – I'll use myself as an example. Currently, I pay approximately \$3.35 per cubic meter (which is equal to 1000 litres of water), or 1/3 of a cent per litre of water – compare that to the cost of bottled water. I am humbled to say that, despite our desire to conserve, my family still uses close to 13,000 litres of water a month. This works out to 170 litres per person/day – just over half of the national average – because we have implemented a number of water saving strategies.

Research and compromise

Let me back up to the genesis of our attempt as a family to be more conscious of our water usage. Our first foray into water savings took place in 2004 in a rental apartment. One weekend while my wife was away I switched the shower head from a standard 9.5 Litre per minute (LPM) head to an ultra, low-flow fixture at 5.7 LPM. Upon her return, however, I was subjected to the first lesson: it is not just about using less, it is also about using resources more wisely. She felt the "paltry spray" required a longer shower, undermining the water savings. Eventually we found a reduced flow fixture (at 6.5 LPM) that would not sacrifice performance. This showerhead met my wife's expectations and resulted in real water savings.

The showerhead moved with us to our current home – a fairly standard postwar bungalow. In this house we have experimented with other water savings, in-

cluding flow restrictors on the bathroom faucets, a removal of our water softener (to cut back on the significant amount of backwash water it goes through) and a new kitchen faucet. In that time, we have managed to reduce our water usage by approximately 18 percent, but the remaining opportunities are vast.

There are other measures we have not had the opportunity to try, such as dual-flush, or High Efficiency Toilets (HET), which can be as low as 3.0/4.8 Liters Per Flush (LPF). Over the last decade North Americans have seen water-conserving technologies fall in price, and with many manufacturers competing, there are more options than ever before.

Interested in putting our suburban water use in context, I did a comparison over two months with life at our off-grid cabin, where water use relates to hand washing, dishes and drinking water. In a two-month window, we used approximately 2,700 liters (excluding offsite laundry and showers). Our typical in-town use totals 26,000 liters for two months. It is amazing what having to carry your water means for how you use it. There are many countries around the world that know this all too well; they would be floored by the fact that we use drinking water to flush toilets.

As far as water is concerned, stewardship can be simple. Start at home, pick a fixture and find out how you can reduce its flow. Showerheads and bathroom faucets are the easiest – a short DIY Saturday project – and you will be amazed at the savings on your water bill. Because water is ubiquitous, essential, and often taken for granted, I believe it is an important place to start.

Jordan Hoogendam is an Engineer who lives in Kitchener, Ont. with his wife and family, where he seeks to become more sustainable at home and in his work. In January, this series will continue with examples of energy conservation and generation.

Where do I find this stuff?

You can search for water savings fixtures at the Water Sense database epa.gov/watersense



Classifieds

Anniversaries

Cobden, Ont. – Dec. 21 – Pembroke, Ont.
With thankfulness to God for His faithfulness,
we celebrate the
60th Wedding Anniversary
of our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents

ADAM AND ANNEKE VANDER VELDE
(nee Stienstra)

Hessel and Audrey Vander Velde – Renfrew, Ont.
Mandy and Dave with 8/9th – Waterloo, Ont.
Shawn and Lisa with Lucas, Anneke – Vernon, B.C.
Tyler – Ottawa, Ont.

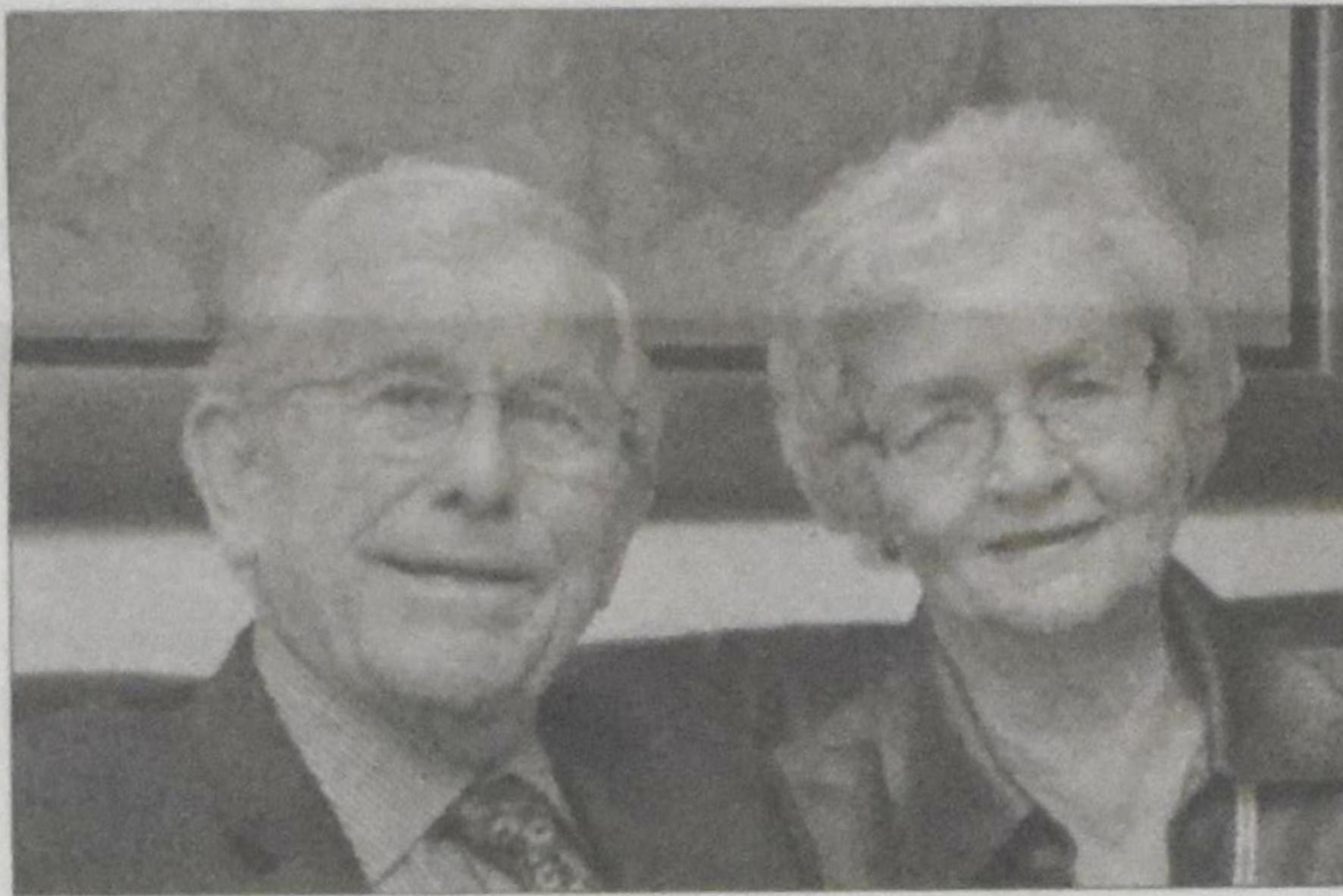
Arnold and Jill Vander Velde of Kingston
Justin and Sarah – Calgary, Alta
Christy – Kingston, Ont.
Derek – Kingston, Ont.

Theresa and John van Manen of Oshawa
Timothy with Emma – London, Ont.
Kimberly and Adam – Whitby, Ont.
James – Ottawa, Ont.

Congratulations may be sent to:
Mr. & Mrs. A Vander Velde
c/o Supples Landing
222- 201 Joseph Street
Pembroke ON K8A 8J2

1952 December 7 2012

"Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labour in vain..."
Ps. 127:1a



WIEGER (Bill) & JOHANNA (Joop) STELPSTRA
(née Renkema)

Please come and celebrate with Dad and Mom at an:
Open House

Saturday, December 29th, 2012
2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Simcoe Rec Centre, 182 South Drive, Simcoe
(corner of South Dr. and Queen St. S.).

Your attendance would be their delight – please no gifts!

Dad and Mom, the LORD has remained faithful to you throughout your lives and your 60 year marriage. Your confession has been this... "Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God." (Ps.90:1,2)

Really, what is 60 years in the midst of eternity??
Humbling ...and astonishing ...and praiseworthy ... "because He himself gives all men life and breath and everything else!"

(Acts 17:25b)

Now may the Master builder continue to build your "house" and to bless you with many more joy-filled days together in Him!

With love, Lynne and Ed and kids

All our love, from your children, grandchildren and great-grandchild:

DAVID & NANCY STELPSTRA – Simcoe, Ont.
Joel & Julie – Ottawa, Ont.; Cameron – London, Ont.

TED & SARA STELPSTRA – Sarnia, Ont.

Brittney & David Salverda (Joseph) – Victoria, B.C.;
Jordan; Dylan

ROBERT STELPSTRA – Québec, Qué.

NELINDA & ED VANDENBERG – Houston, B.C.
Lauren - Ancaster, Ont.; Taylor, Maggie, Jonas

Address: 150 Oak St., Unit 2, Simcoe ON N3Y 5M5

Ph. No.: (1) 519-426-1687

1962 – December 14 – 2012
With thankfulness to God for His faithfulness,
we celebrate the
50th Wedding Anniversary
of our parents and grandparents

WARNER AND ELISABETH (BETSY) BOER
(nee Buesink)

The family invites you to join in celebrating
God's blessings with an
Open House

Saturday, December 15, 2012

2:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Immanuel Christian Reformed Church
95 Oak Street, Simcoe, Ont.

Harry John Boer (†1963)
Harry and Faith Boer (Hamilton)
Carleen, Taylor, Rebecca
Jeff and Jayne Boer (Dunnville)
Samantha, Jake
Robert and Keri Boer (Black Mountain, NC)
Emily
Jonathan and Christine Boer (London)
Alex, Kyrsten, Megan

Congratulations may be sent to:
26 Elm Street, Simcoe ON N3Y 3B3

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Jeremiah 29:11

50th Wedding Anniversary

1962 – December 15 – 2012

JOHN AND SYLVIA REITSMA

We are thankful for the
Grace and Faithfulness
God has shown to our parents.

With love....

STEVEN & KIM REITSMA
Jonathan, Olivia

[Strathroy]

ELLIOTT & LILLIAN REITSMA

Elliana, Mackenzie, Owen, Selena
[Goderich]

RANDY & BARB REITSMA

Kristen, Lauren, Jonathan, Katelyn
[Guelph]

TANYA & JAMES KONING

Melanie, Dayton, Sydney, Troy
[Caledonia]

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London ON N6H 5J3



1962 December 14 2012
Prince George, BC

WILLIAM (BILL) TAVENER
AND ELIZABETH TAVENER-DEGRAAF

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50th anniversary!

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(Jubal, Caleb, Gloria)
Dan & Michelle Tavener
(Ben, Caehlan, Denae)

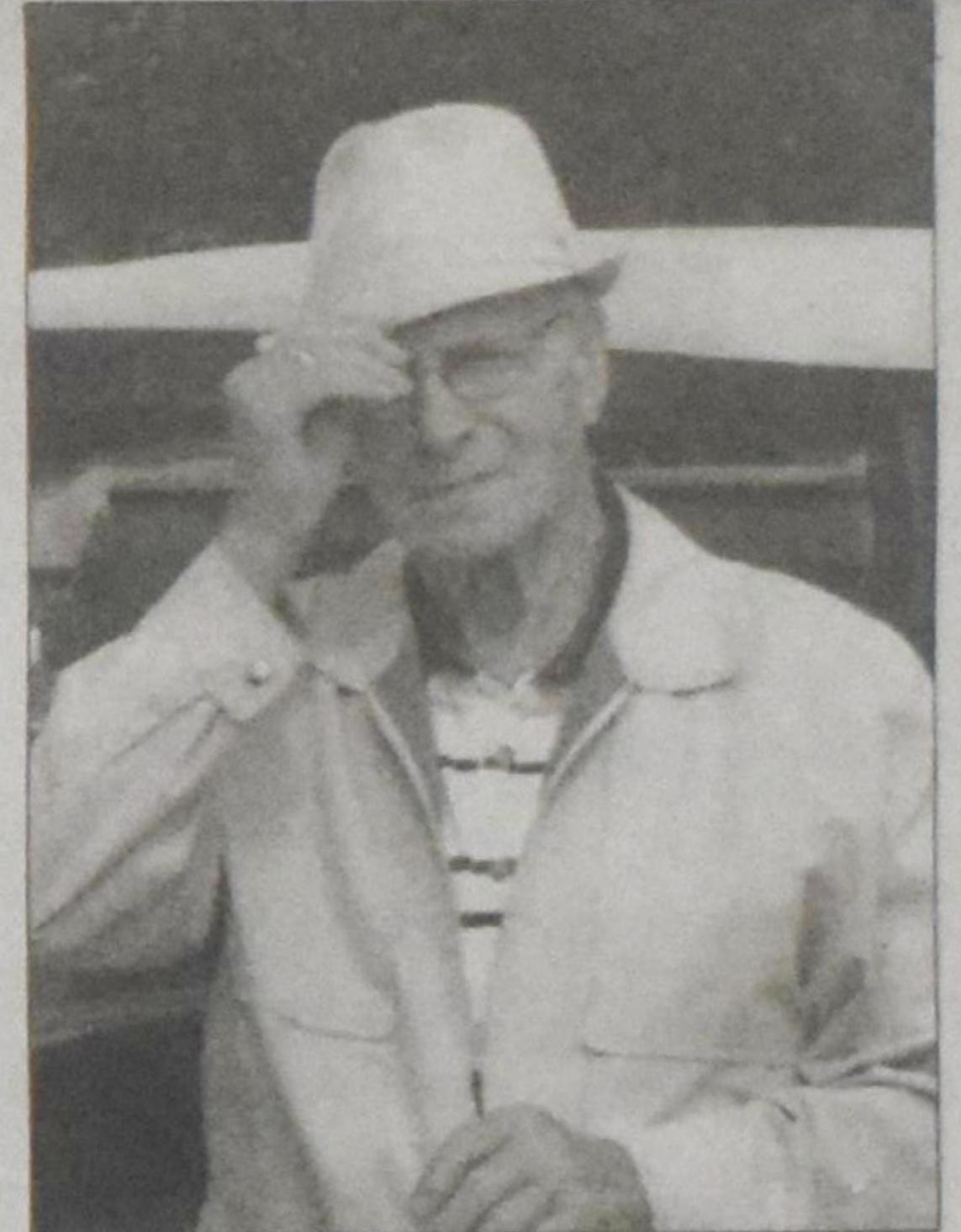
Jo-Ann Tavener-Vriend & Richard Vriend.

Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. Ps. 84:5

1271 Mathie Road
Prince George BC V2K 1B3

Obituary

IN LOVING REMEMBRANCE



Bert VanderMeer

Sept. 29, 1930 Oct. 27, 2012
Boornbergum Fr. Niagara Falls, Ont.

It pleased the Lord at His time to take home His
child Bert on Saturday, October 27, 2012 in his
83rd year.

Bert was a loving husband to Clara (Admiraal)
for 59 years.

Dad will be remembered always by his children,
Mike (Leonie), Stuart (Alice), Mark (Wendy),
George (Betty) and Chris.

He left a legacy of love to 19 grandchildren and
14 great-grandchildren.

He is survived by one brother and three sisters in
the Netherlands.

Ephesians 5:19-20

Correspondence: Clara VanderMeer
3286 Portage Rd
Niagara Falls ON L2J 2K2

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christiancourier.ca family ads link on the
bottom banner.

Obituary

July 11, 1925
Beilen, Netherlands

Psalm 23

November 2, 2012
Grimsby Ont

Alice (Aaltje) Hessels – nee Groote

Mom was called home by her Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. She passed away peacefully at Shalom Manor after a lengthy illness. Her husband Peter had predeceased her on April 22, 2010.

Children, Grandchildren & Great-grandchildren:

John & Ellen Hessels Brampton Ont.

Greg & Aileen (Dirk), Janice

Anne & John Lemstra Binbrook Ont.

David, Wes & Lindsay (Elizabeth, Benjamin & Abigail), Alexa

Alice & Joel Wiersma Mt. Hope Ont.

Alicia & Carl Hunter (Ethan), Krista & Jon Christink

Jennifer & Mark Vanderherberg (Caroline & Hannah), Steven

Rhea & Andy Langendoen St. Catharines Ont.

Dan & Deb (Lukas), Phil & Melinda, Scott, Michael, Kurt & Torrey

Henry & Nancy Hessels Dunnville Ont.

Kathleen & Greg Peake (Alan), Peter, Joanna, Mark

Clarence & Kim Hessels Dunnville Ont.

Chelsea, Brittany, Travis

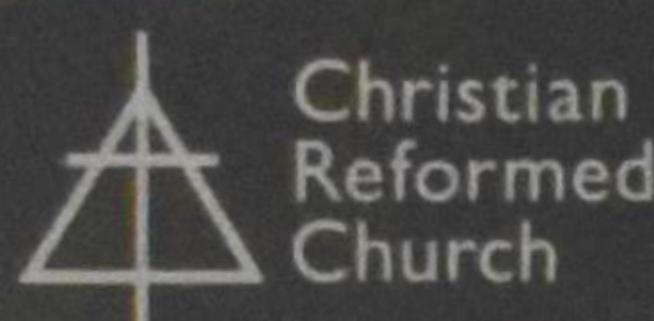
Sister to Hendrik† & Co† Groote, Aaldert† & Treint† Groote, Rika & Hendrik Bruinsma, Jannie & Louis† Schoen, Femmie† & Jan† van de Merwe, Annie & Markus† Biel. Sister-in-law of Klaas† & Mien Hessels, Henk† & Hillie Hessels, Fanny & Klaas Fluit, Hillie & Marissen Stevens, Lucas† & Klaasje Hessels, Bet† & Jantje Hessels.

Funeral was held at the Mountainview CRC, Grimsby, on Monday, Nov 5, 2012.

Mail any correspondence to John & Ellen Hessels

20 Hartford Trail, Brampton ON L6W 4G5

Jobs / Advertising



Seeking potential nominees for

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Responsible for nurturing a shared and vibrant vision for God's mission lived out through the Christian Reformed Church, in close cooperation with local congregations, classes, and the agencies and institutions of the CRCNA.

The nominee should possess a faithful, vibrant, and personal Reformed Christian faith marked by humility and moral integrity; provide visionary servant leadership for the ministries, embracing risk and welcoming challenge. He or she will inspire trust and bridge diverse perspectives, and empower and encourage others to do the same.

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Direct all inquiries to Mr. Loren Veldhuizen,
Executive Director Search Committee Chair
veldhuizen45@gmail.com

The Human Resource Team of
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Church** in Grimsby is searching for a

Worship/Music Director

for 24 hours per week.

A job description for this position is available
from Nelly Baarda at
nbaarda@mountainviewcrc.org.

Anyone interested in this position is invited to
submit an application to Sue Kikkert at suekikkert@hotmail.com.

Please include a brief history of your work
experience that you believe is appropriate for
this position.

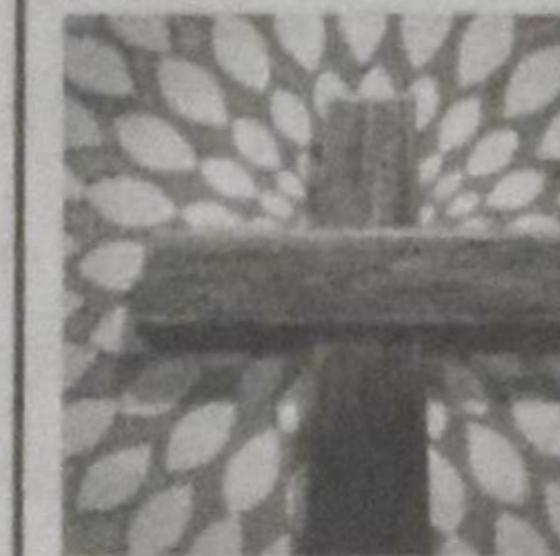
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The Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby, needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child. The more you think about it, the more staggering it gets. Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as this truth of the Incarnation.

-J.I. Packer

Born in a stable, cradled in a manger, he came forth from heaven to live on earth as mortal man and to establish the kingdom of God. During His earthly ministry, He taught men the higher law. His glorious gospel reshaped the thinking of the world. He blessed the sick. He caused the lame to walk, the blind to see, the deaf to hear. He even raised the dead to life. To us he has said,

"Come, follow me."

As we seek Christ, as we find him, as we follow him, we shall have the Christmas spirit, not for one fleeting day each year, but as a companion always. We shall learn to forget ourselves. We shall turn our thoughts to the greater benefit of others.

-Thomas S. Monson

Who can add to Christmas? The perfect motive is that God so loved the world. The perfect gift is that he gave his only Son. The only requirement is to believe in him. The reward of faith is that you shall have everlasting life.

-Corrie Ten Boom

It is impossible to conceive how different things would have turned out if that birth had not happened whenever, wherever, however it did ... for millions of people who have lived since, the birth of Jesus made possible not just a new way of understanding life but a new way of living it. It is a truth that, for twenty centuries, there have been untold numbers of men and women who, in untold numbers of ways, have been so grasped by the child who was born, so caught up in the message he taught and the life he lived, that they have found themselves profoundly changed by their relationship with him.

- Frederick Buechner

Christmas quotes



The Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby, needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child. The more you think about it, the more staggering it gets. Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as this truth of the Incarnation.

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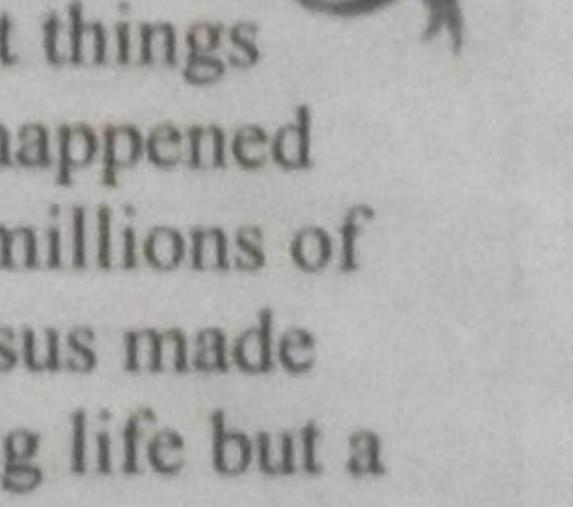
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-Corrie Ten Boom



Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Dec 8 Musica Sacra Chorus, Arise Shine for thy Light has Come, 8 p.m. Hope CRC, Brantford, Ont. See ad Nov 26 issue.

Dec. 9 - Dutch Service will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Henry DeBolster will be preaching. DVDs are available.

Dec 22 Musica Sacra Chorus, Arise Shine for thy Light has Come, 8 p.m. Church of the Epiphany, 560 Dundas St., Woodstock, Ont. See ad Nov 26 issue.

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For further information contact: Rosanne van der Woerd
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-C.S.Lewis

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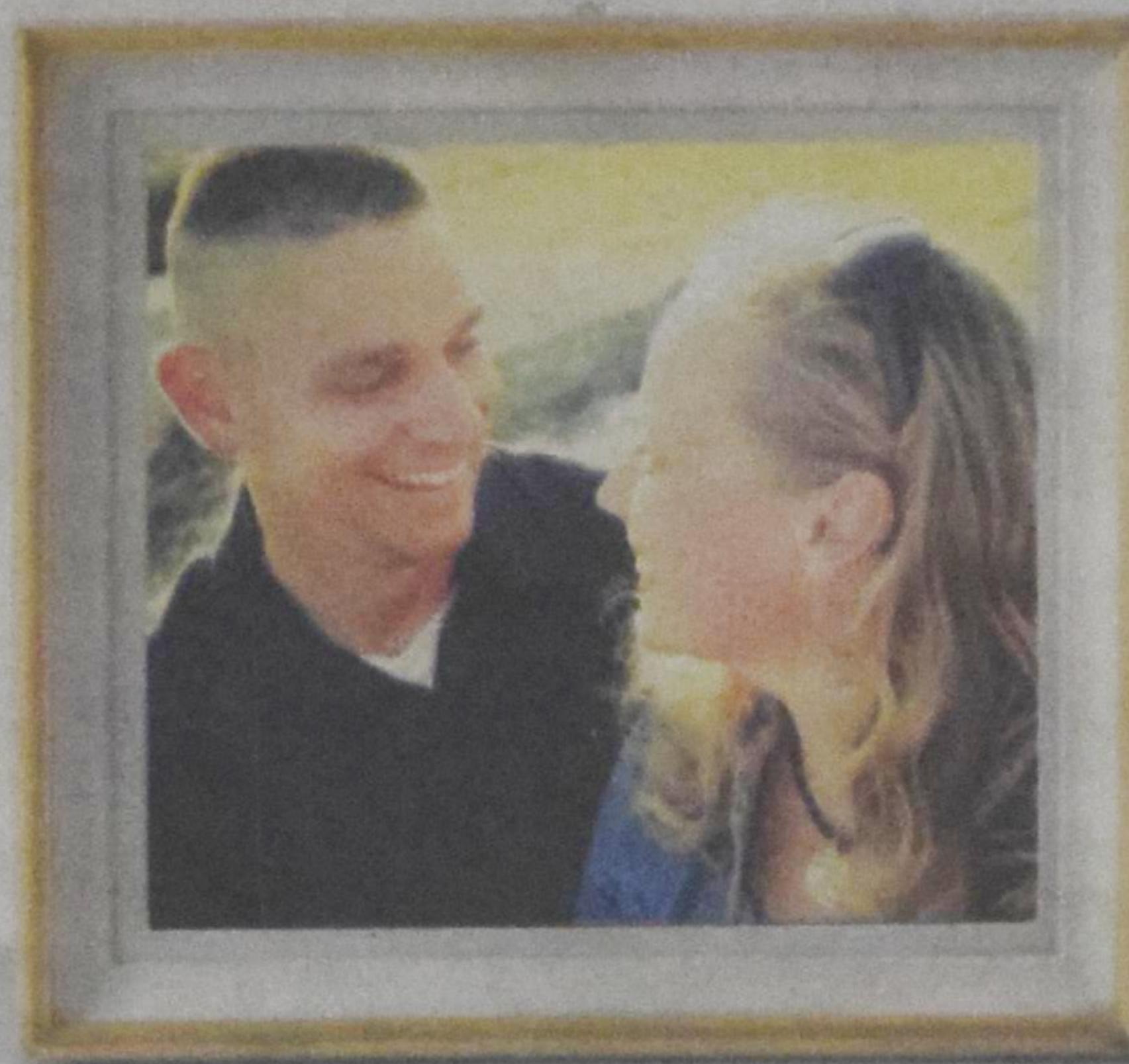
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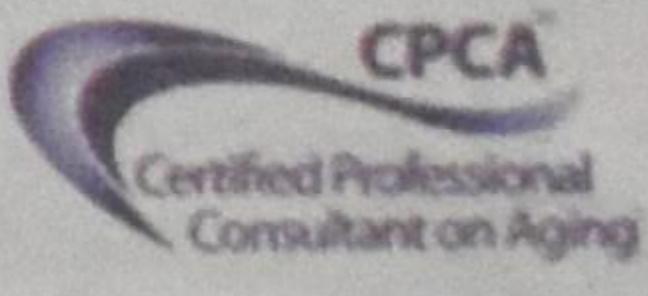


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